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# F O L L Y .

A Novel,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. NEWTON SEARS,

*Author of "Kismet" and "Cleansing Fires."*

"Satan finds some mischief still,  
For idle hands to do."

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VOL. III.

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# F O L L Y .

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## CHAPTER I.

“ The light of a whole life dies when love is gone.”

WITH Gladys, to determine, was to do. She wasted no time in idle, fruitless regrets, but applied herself steadily and bravely to the task before her.

The early morning post was in, and she hurried downstairs just as Hope had placed by her breakfast plate a letter. Now Gladys' correspondents were few and far between, and this letter had been the subject of at least five minutes minute scrutiny and curiosity ; therefore when Gladys tore it open and having read it through, returned it to its envelope, and continued her



breakfast calmly, the cousins exchanged glances, and Charity tossed her head scornfully.

When Gladys finished her egg, and received a cup, filled a second time, from her aunt's hands, she looked up quietly and asked, "Uncle, may I have a few moments' conversation with you in the library?"

"Certainly my dear, certainly!" replied the gentleman, becoming redder than ever, in his eagerness to appear as if it were no unusual proceeding that a young and beautiful woman should wish for a private interview; but Mrs. Sourby fixed her small eyes suspiciously on her husband's face. Had not Simon dared, positively dared, to take her niece's part when she had explained to him the enormity of the offence she had committed; and laughed, actually

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laughed in *her*, Mrs. Sourby's, face, while he had repeated some vulgar proverb about "counting her chickens." And did Simon really think that she would submit to this kind of thing? Allow him to be closeted with Gladys Vaughan, while she, his lawful wife, was excluded? No, indeed! Her eyes flashed as she accosted her niece, "You can say what you wish to do *here*!"

"Why!" was on the tip of the girl's tongue to enquire, but the next instant she laughed outright—

"Do you suspect me of hatching treason against you, Aunt Diana?" she asked merrily "that you refuse to let me speak to uncle alone!"

That lady looked rather foolish, but quickly recovering herself, she retorted—

"You can scarcely expect to be trusted

after your extraordinary conduct, and I candidly confess that I am in daily terror as to what your eccentricities will lead you to next."

"Then, madam," said Gladys, hot and angry "I am happy to inform you that your martyrdom will be speedily concluded, as I purpose leaving your hospitable roof to-day week."

"And where do you go, pray, if I may be permitted to ask?"

Gladys drew an envelope from her pocket, and scribbled down a few words, and passed it over to her aunt—

"MISS VAUGHAN,

"MRS. RICHARDSON,

The Cedars,

South Kensington.

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“That is my future address,” she added explanatorily,” and uncle, as I should be sorry to ask you to do anything that would annoy my aunt, I will say *here* what I had wished to explain privately—it is a very simple matter—merely, that I should be glad if you would kindly hand over to me the remaining sum of my year’s income, deducting four months’ payment for the accommodation I have received.”

“Upon my word!” screamed her aunt, “a pretty piece of meanness! Why you don’t suppose that your paltry hundred pounds would *cover* what you have received here, do you?” disregarding her husband’s uplifted finger. “If ever I allow Simon to—”

“My dear, you forget yourself,” said her spouse. “Gladys, what remains

from your income shall be handed over to you to-morrow, and I do not think we need prolong this discussion," turning blandly to his wife.

" Oh that I should have lived to see this day," cried the lady, taking up her breakfast napkin, and holding it to her face, " when my own husband turns from me, and takes the part of a daughter of—of Beelzebub—yes Simon I *will* say it ! To think that you, too, should be so weak as to allow yourself to be led away by a shameless little hussy."

Simon rose from his seat, and taking his wife's reluctant hand, led her from the room.

" I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself, that I do !" cried Faith angrily—" to come into anyone's house

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for the express purpose of breeding dissension, and—”

“ Oh don’t be such a simpleton,” returned her cousin, whose patience was well nigh exhausted, but as she mounted the stairs to her own apartment, a smile broke over her face. When they first took up their quarters at Jordan House, Ruth, with more honesty than politeness had expressed to her mistress her opinion of the three young ladies—with their saintly names—“ And if so be as they must have Bible names, miss, it’s a pity they couldn’t be a little more appropriate ; *I* should have christened ’em ‘Plague,’ ‘Pestilence,’ and ‘Famine,’” she had said demurely ; and just at this moment Gladys felt she would have given a good deal if the Miss Sourbys

could have been enlightened as to their soubriquets.

Gladys managed to see her way clear to a speedy departure. There was only one other matter to arrange, and that was, what was to become of Ruth? She was, or her mistress supposed that she was, in blissful ignorance of the disturbance downstairs, and she had scrupulously refrained from enlightening her until she had secured a home for herself, and could make up her mind what to do with her faithful little waiting-maid. But Ruth herself paved the way in a most unexpected manner.

Gladys sat wearily in the depths of an arm chair, and, if truth be told, the bright tear-drops were sparkling on her lashes, for she was thinking, looking back on the brightly-tinted past, and shuddering at the



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gloomy future that stretched before her. Why had the sunlight ever flooded her path only to vanish and leave the blackness of night behind ? Into the midst of her sad thoughts comes Ruth, with a tender flush upon her face, and a certain nervousness foreign to that self-possessed damsel apparent in the hesitating tones.

“ If you please miss,” rosy flushes chase each other over her face, and she pauses—

“ Well, Ruth, what is it ?”

Gladys looks up into the sparkling, happy features, with perhaps something of envy at her heart, and a misty consciousness of what is coming.

Ruth slips on her knees by the arm-chair, and hiding her face, begins her simple story—“ You see miss, Jem has cared for



me a long while," with womanly triumph in her tone, "and it doesn't seem fair that he shouldn't have what he wants so bad, and has worked so hard to get. It's now four years since I knew Jem—he came to England before we did, Miss Gladys, and his mother died over in Calcutta, and the last thing she said was as she hoped I'd make her boy a good wife. I had no thought of it then, miss—you see he isn't much to look at, isn't Jem, though he has an honest heart there's no denying."

"But Ruth, how have you managed to see your sweetheart; I didn't suppose you had a single friend in London."

Ruth looked guilty.


"Well miss, I didn't see him often when we were in the Brunswick Square, though

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I *have* met him permiscuously in Lamb's Conduit Street, when I've been coming back from the post, in the evenings. He used to write to me, but I didn't always answer his letters, and I wasn't always over glad to see him ; but when folks love you they'll dare a deal and be just talked, and talked to, and kind of persuaded, and Jem is a good *argufyer*, until—I—I couldn't hold out any longer miss. I was lonely, and he loved me so !”

“ You did quite right, Ruth,” Gladys' soft voice breaks in, while the tears brim over in the beautiful eyes and roll down one by one—“ true love is not met with in an every day ramble. If he loves you, you will be happy. Go on, tell me where you next saw him.”

“ Oh, miss, I didn't behave well after



that! I went away with you, you remember, and I didn't see Jem for a long while. He was footman in a family in Portland Place, and it wasn't likely he could get away for a holiday—and I—I thought it all over, and I felt I didn't *want* to marry him some how. Then, miss, we came back to town again, and I met Jem one night in the Square, and he says, very patient-like, 'Ruth, how long am I to wait? Don't you think you know your own mind yet?' And I says to him, 'Jem, it isn't no use! There's no good comes of marrying, and I'm not going to get into as big a scrape as my young—'

Ruth paused, conscious that in her enthusiasm, she was telling home truths, and treading on dangerous ground, but Gladys' hand still stroked softly the dark

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head, and after a moment, she went on hurriedly—

“Jem just laughed at me. Oh, miss, I don’t know what he *said*, I only know that I felt as if he were right and I was wrong, and as though I couldn’t be happy, after all, without him—so gentle, and good he is, and I am very sorry to leave you, Miss Gladys, only you see he *wants* me, and I *must* go,” deprecatingly.

Ruth was crying in right earnest now.

“Hush, don’t be foolish. You are a very happy woman, Ruth, what need have you for tears? The man you love has proved his love for *you*, has waited patiently for you. Oh, my girl, I think you are very much to be envied.”

And so it was fated that she should be more desolate, more lonely than ever—



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dethroned from her place in the heart of perhaps the truest friend she had in the world ; for was not Ruth's whole mind already filled with her lover, and thoughts and hopes for the future ?


Gladys smothered a sigh.

“ Has Jem saved any money, Ruth ? ”

“ Yes, miss,” proudly, “ I should think he had ! You see he's had good wages, and been very careful, and he's taken a little house down Islington way for—for *us*.”

“ When did you see him last ? ” asked her mistress, with a sudden dawning of light on a subject that had much troubled and mystified her, but which, amid the turmoil and misery of the last fortnight had almost escaped her memory.

“ It's been a bit difficult here,” confessed Ruth ingenuously, “ but I *have* managed




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to creep out and talk to him a bit sometimes, and I don't think he'd have been in such a hurry if I could have met him oftener, and had our talks more comfortable."

"He will have to give up his situation, of course?" questioned the kindly-heart, striving to interest itself in this simple love that seemed to sail so smoothly where *her* heart had wrecked itself.

"Yes, miss, he has left Portland Place already. We are going to let lodgings, and Jem will go out to wait at dinners, and that sort of thing. Oh, no fear that he won't get on, Miss Gladys; Jem is so clever and industrious!"

Ah, me, the rose-coloured spectacles of youth, and the thrice-blessed blindness and joyous trust of love!



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“I am very happy to hear all this, dear Ruth, because, under any circumstances, we must have parted soon.”

The girl looked up with a saucy gleam in her dark eyes.

“Oh, Miss Gladys—I’ve seen it coming! I knew I’d lose you again—.”

“What do you mean, foolish girl?” with a ring of pain in her clear, young voice.

“I’m not so blind but that I can see; did you really think I didn’t *know*? And, oh, I am so glad, so glad! God grant, dear lady, that you may be happier this time.”

The slim hands locked themselves together and a very tempest of sorrow shook the proud heart, but Gladys only whispered calmly—

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“You are mistaken, Ruth! I am going into the world to earn my living, and—I am not rich enough to be able to keep you with me.”

“Miss Gladys!—what do you mean?”

In her excitement Ruth sprang to her feet.

“I mean that I cannot live here any longer—I am not happy, and I would rather go away.”

“But he—Mr. Langridge,” stammered Ruth, “what will he say to it?”

“Are you mad, Ruth,” sharply. “What has Mr. Langridge to do with any determination of mine?”

“Then you—you do not care for him?” looking wonderingly at the white face, “and I have been mistaken? Oh, I was so happy, for I did not think you could help loving him.”



“You mustn’t talk in this way,” said Gladys, feeling that she *must* put a stop to it some how; “your mind is so full of romance and sentiment that you have foolishly magnified a simple friendship into—”

“Well, if Mr. Langridge isn’t over head and ears in love with you, I’m a Jewess,” cried Ruth, “and you—oh, Miss Gladys, you’re just going to throw your happiness away. Oh, dear, oh, dear ! what a dreadful world this is. Everybody does what they shouldn’t, and goes making mistakes, just like *I* might have done, if my Jem hadn’t been so patient and true.”

And so it came about that the day before Gladys left Jordan House, Ruth Ruddock went to a home of her own, and the pretty little bride’s face was all stained

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and swollen with tears as she threw her arms round her dear mistress's neck in farewell, while Jem Watson stood by with a pitiful look of consternation on his honest features at this terrible burst of emotion on the part of his new-made wife, knowing that he was powerless to comfort or console.

“There, there, Ruth, you must not cry any more, or your good husband will believe that you are regretting already what it took you so many months to make up your mind to,” laughingly, though, truth to tell, the tears were not far from Gladys' own eyes, as she watched her little maid link her arm within that of her loving Jem, and leave the church together, and realised that *she* was now indeed—alone!

## CHAPTER II.

"She has two eyes so soft and brown,  
Take care!  
She gives a side glance, and looks down—  
Beware! Beware!  
Trust her not—she's fooling thee!"

"SHUT the door, Miss Vaughan!—thank you! Now bring that chair, and sit close by my sofa, for I cannot talk very loudly, my poor lungs are so weak."

Mrs. Richardson was a delicate fragile-looking woman, with a wondrously beautiful complexion, and quantities of fair bright hair. As she lay back among her cushions Gladys mentally compared her to some exquisitely tinted picture she had seen years ago. It was a pity that the charm should be broken when she opened her mouth, for anything more daintily fair than

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the fascinating widow it would be difficult to imagine ; from the tiny white hands to the slender arched foot she was as perfect a specimen of tender womanhood as it was possible to meet with, and the harsh metallic tones of her voice roused Gladys disagreeably. She had yet to learn that that fair exterior covered a selfish, exacting, domineering spirit, even as the rosebud mouth and pearl-like teeth failed to disguise the unsympathetic voice, which jarred so on the listener.

Mrs. Richardson was a beauty ; and vain as she had been in her youth, she was now, if possible, more fond of admiration than ever, and peevish as any spoiled child when she failed to exact it.

She had now been a widow some three or four years, and missing the strong, kindly

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heart which had beat so truly and solely for her, and quickened at every change that passed over the lovely mobile face, she had sought in vain amusement and variety, and her last caprice was to consider herself an interesting invalid, and certainly she played the *rôle* to perfection. With that soft hectic flush coming and going in her clear cheek, the delicate blue veins that you could so easily trace in the ivory brow—she had, without doubt, materials ready to hand; and this was the lady to whom Gladys Vaughan had consented to act as companion.

“To read aloud; to fan me; write my letters, and amuse me—nothing more, Miss Vaughan!”

Not a very onerous task, truly, yet before Gladys had been an inmate at the Cedars twenty-four hours, she dimly

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comprehended that she must furbish up, and make the most of her small stock of patience and good nature, for she would stand sorely in need of it. What was comprised in the single word "amusement," seemed inexhaustible. The lady refused to be entertained—nothing pleased her—what was to be done? Gladys racked her brains in vain to supply her with occupation.

"Tell me of yourself," said the widow, one afternoon—"tell me all about your lovers, child!"

"I—" stammered the girl, confusedly, while a hot flush mounted her brow.

"You needn't blush so becomingly," laughed her questioner. "Come, it will amuse me; tell me about them."

Gladys folded up her work, saying



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gently, but firmly—"There has been little of interest in my life, madam; nothing that would amuse you to hear."

"Nonsense!" sharply; "you know I must not be contradicted. Dr. Walshe said so. I will stop you if it does not interest me."

For a moment Gladys glanced at the flushed pink cheeks, with half a mind to call upon her imagination, and improvise some love story for the sick lady's edification. If she could have spoken what was actually the truth—if she could have said, "I am a married woman," and have sketched her fourteen days of conjugal felicity—the death of her boy husband, and the troubles that had befallen her since—the deep love of her woman's heart, and its sorry sequel—I think even Mrs. Richard-

son would have been satisfied, and have found it more entertaining than half the rubbish she threw aside, because the telling of the old, old story was not to her liking. But it was scarcely to be expected that she should reveal the bitter trials of her young life, and lay bare the most sacred recesses of her heart for the amusement of an idle hour, and to prevent time from hanging too heavily on the widow's taper fingers. No, indeed! Gladys pursed up her mouth, and looked very resolute.

"You must excuse me," she said softly, "I have no lover's story worth telling, but I will amuse you with an account of three young ladies whom I know."

And forthwith she related the doings and sayings of Faith, Hope and Charity. And as she had a ready wit and a keen



sense of the ridiculous, Mrs. Richardson was infinitely amused, and actually once or twice laughed outright, a genuinely unrestrained laugh; but, by-and-bye, she went back to the old subject, with the persistency of an over indulged child.

“And so you never had a lover! Humph! I suppose I must have monopolised him, for I have certainly had more than my share,” in a would-be coquettish tone, and off she started on a rambling dissertation, while Gladys inwardly marvelled how any woman could be so inordinately vain and self-conceited. Once started on her hobby, Mrs. Richardson was wont to ride it until completely exhausted, and Gladys folded her hands, and fixed her eyes on the fair face, apparently the best of listeners, but in reality with ears shut, and

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heart and thoughts far, far away—out of smoky, grimy London, back among the shrubs and under the trees in the woods and grounds at Hazelhurst, while memory conjured up the loved form of the man who had despised and cast her from him.

She could not have been so relentless, so unpitying! Ah! what could not she have pardoned, short of dead love and forgotten troth?

But what is the widow saying?—"Poor Claude Raynor! But it was not my fault!"

Claude Raynor! Where had she heard the name before, and why did it seem so strangely familiar?

"And as I said, my dear," continued the pretty, indolent woman, "he came again and again, until at last, even to my obtuse

mind, his meaning became plain ; but, you see, I couldn't marry him, now could I ?" appealingly—


"So you refused him ?" asked Gladys, vaguely, seeing that she was expected to make some remark.

"Did I not explain to you," cried the sharp voice, "that he was not worth a penny ! Was I to be such a dolt as to throw myself away on a beggar ? Now, if"—with a long drawn sigh—"if, by any good luck he should ever succeed to the title, that would be another matter ; and, although I can't say that I ever cared for poor Claude (he was too cold and undemonstrative), yet, under those circumstances, I might be persuaded ! I have a comfortable income, and he would have a coronet to offer ; but—oh dear !" sinking lazily back

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again among her purple cushions, "such a thing is not in the least likely to happen; there would have to be a wholesale slaughter before such a consummation could be reached—his brother has two sons, if not more!" And so she rattled on, while Gladys stared blankly before her, seeing, as in a dream, the small restless hands, and pretty expressive face, and asking herself again and again—who and what was Claude Raynor?

Some hours later, when the evening had closed in, and Gladys was in her own room, making her simple toilette for the *tête-à-tête* tea, the sound of the invalid's bell loudly ringing startled and somewhat alarmed her. What had happened? Was she worse? Downstairs sped Gladys. Mrs. Richardson sat upright on her



couch, with sparkling eyes and crimson cheeks.

“The shock has nearly killed me,” she gasped, and indeed when the colour had faded, she lay back white and still.

“What is it?” asked the girl compassionately, and detaching a newspaper from the trembling fingers, she spread it open, seeking for an explanation of this excitement.

“Sad accident to a boating party on the Thames,” could that be it? The last paragraph solved the mystery—“Claude Raynor is, we believe, the heir to the title.”


“How very strange!” cried Gladys aloud.

“I always loved him,” began the foolish babbler again; “did I not tell you only this very afternoon how I would have married

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him long ago if—if—well, of course, it would have been the height of folly to have done so on *my* small income ; we must have starved, positively starved, my dear.”

And so on, over and over again, until I really believe she convinced herself of her own sincerity. Not so Gladys ; she remembered perfectly distinctly all that had been said of Claude Raynor by his vapid mercenary love—how she had declared that she had never cared for him personally, but that should he, by any unforeseen freak of fortune, come into the title, she would be willing to exchange her own wealth for his coronet—and keen disgust for the vain, weak, worldly woman, mingled with a vast pity for the misguided man, who, according to the lady’s account, really loved *her*, woke within her breast.



For days after this, Mrs. Richardson was more exacting and hard to please than ever, and Gladys almost made up her mind that she could not endure it any longer, but look out for some more congenial post ; yet, as Uncle Simon had warned her, “ladies requiring companions were not met with every day,” and although she surreptitiously scanned the advertisement sheet of the “Times” day by day, she could find nothing.

Tea was over, and Mrs. Richardson, who had been really ailing and weak all day, had fallen into a dose, and thankful for a rest, Gladys stole softly from the room. On the stairs she met the widow’s lady’s maid—a pert, saucy girl, for whom Gladys had no liking. In her hand she held a silk dress belonging to her mistress.

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“Here, Miss Vaughan,” she said, as contemptuously as she dared, “the missus wants this unpicked, and what with one thing and another, *I* have no time to do it! The whims she has, I’m sure! A whole lot of lace collars to get up at this time of day.”

“What can you mean, Taylor?” asked Gladys, honestly astonished.

In all probability, had the girl come to her and complained of over-much work, Gladys would good-naturedly have offered to assist, but that she should take it as a matter of course, and demand it in this impertinent manner, was not to be tolerated for an instant.

“You make a mistake,” she continued, with quiet dignity, “I am not Mrs. Richardson’s *maid*, and when she does not



wish to have me, my time is at my own disposal."

"Hoighty, toighty!" sneered the girl; "not her maid, forsooth, but something a vast deal more important. Well, we'll wait and see what my missus will say with the dyer a-calling to-morrow, and no dress ready, and h<sup>a</sup>ll because the companion gives herself *hairs*! My patience!"

Gladys did smile; she couldn't help it, as she passed on to her own room, taking no further notice of the girl's insolence. She was glad of a little time to herself, and stitched away right busily, until at length tired, she pushed back the hair from her brow, and wondered why Mrs. Richardson's bell had not rung, for the time had passed quickly, and it was growing late. Could she have been sleeping all this time?

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Another quarter of an hour passed away, and as still no summons came ; Gladys went downstairs.

The door was ajar as she had left it, but Mrs. Richardson was awake—awake and sitting up, with her face down-bent, rosy, and blushing, and her hand on the curly locks of a man kneeling beside her.

“ Leonie, do you mean this ? ”

Pretty traitress as she was, she whispered how she had always loved him best, and that it was conscientiousness, and consideration for *him* solely that had prompted her to refuse his offer before.

“ My darling—my angel ! ”

I wonder how many women have been called angels, with as little right to the title as the lady in question ?

“ I am the happiest man alive ! ”

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He rose, and gathered the yielding form in his arms—one glimpse Gladys had of his full face, and she turned and fled.

Again ! Was that man ever to haunt her ?

Claude Raynor ! Could she have heard Lionel mention him in the old days, that his name should be so familiar ? And yet somehow she could not connect the name and the individual. It seemed as though she had known or heard of Claude Raynor in another world. It was very strange ! And then she sighed. From what she had overheard she was justified in supposing that her services would be required but a short time longer, and then—where was she to go ? what was to become of her ?

Gladys fell asleep that night anxious and troubled, but her dreams were not of the

fair, false widow, nor yet of the coming change in her own fortunes, but of the man whom Leonie Richardson had so hopelessly enslaved and infatuated—the man whom Gladys Vaughan had seen but three times in her life, and each one marked with a black stone in her memory, for they had come laden with sorrow and trouble to herself, and in her dreams she groped blindly for a clue—a missing, undefined something, a link that would connect the dim past with the present—but she found it not.



### CHAPTER III.

I know thee ; light as foam that plays  
The ocean waves among ;  
I know thee ; vain as ever gaze  
Upon the mirror flung.  
A liking, light as thine, love,  
Was never meant to last !

“PRAY make haste, Miss Vaughan ! It is too bad that you should idle so when you know how hurried I am. I don’t believe, child, you ever were in love yourself, or you would have more pity for a fellow-sufferer.”

“Are you really so much in love ?” asked Gladys, with a slight curl of the proud mouth.

The pretty, dimpled face flushed, and the rosy lips pouted, “What a question ! Am I in love with such a handsome gallant

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as Claude, to say nothing of his title, and—”

“But,” impatiently, “if—if he were a beggar—what of your love then? Would you still cherish and cling to him?”

“How do I know?” peevishly. “How can I tell? No! I suppose not; I am only human, and I never had much desire to try the felicity of love in a cottage.”

Yes, she was very human, very frail, very worldly, and yet she was so daintily lovely that Gladys did not think it strange that she should be beloved; and the glittering hair caught the sunlight, and the dark lashes lay on the rounded cheek, pink as the heart of a sea-shell, and fascinated Gladys as she gazed. Beauty may be only skin deep, but it is not to be despised, for it wins women the hearts they covet.

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"There, now my gloves," taking the lemon-tinted pair from Gladys' hands. "Do I look nice, my dear?"

"Yes, you do," said the girl, enthusiastically.

There was nothing mean or jealous about Gladys, and she did most sincerely admire the dainty little figure before her, and then Leonie Richardson tripped downstairs to join her lover, and after waiting to hear the hall door shut, Gladys followed.

How should she spend the interval before the lady should return? In all probability she would be absent two or three hours, for she had gone to see some celebrated pictures then on view, and Gladys had the luxury of pleasing herself.

To commence with, she threw herself at full length on the couch and clasped her

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arms above her head in delicious, lazy consciousness of being alone.

She was disagreeably startled, the door opened quickly, and before she could spring to her feet, Claude Raynor advanced into the room and walked straight up to the centre table, pausing there, arrested by the half-recumbent figure.

“You!” he cried.

“Yes, it is I,” she said firmly, though her lips grew white. “Did you not know that I am companion to your *fiancée*?”

“Good heavens—no!” he ejaculated. “What trick have you of forcing your way into the houses of innocent women?”

“Am I, then, too wicked to be permitted near the fair widow?” she asked, scornfully.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Who am



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I that I should judge? But how can I help thinking you extremely foolish in risking so much?"

She echoed his words blankly, "What do you mean? I have nothing to risk. What right have you to speak to me in this way?"

He smiled lazily down on her from his six feet of manhood, and stroked his moustache superciliously. "We have met more than once, yet you did not recognise me," he said, vaguely, "in Ventnor—you do not care to deny that?"

"Oh no," wearily. "What does it matter? I know you were in some mysterious way connected with Lionel, although I never understood how. Poor soul! if he had lived but one short day more, I should have learned everything."

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“ You are living here under your own name ? ” he asked, abruptly.

“ Why not ? If I choose to take my maiden name, who is there to object ? ”

“ Certainly you are justified in pleasing yourself, and probably it would only lead to complications if— ”

“ Well, Claude, cannot you find my letters ? ” Leonie stands, framed in the doorway, looking surprisedly at the scene before her. “ Are you—do you know— ? ”

“ Yes, Leonie, I have the honour of Miss Vaughan’s acquaintance. ”

A dark red flush stained Gladys’ cheek, but Mrs. Richardson took no notice of her beyond a hasty glance.

“ Here are my letters, ” she said. “ Come Claude, we are very late ! ”

Claude Raynor, or as we should now call

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in love, and it was very troublesome and disagreeable to be jealous, so she accepted what he said to her, and by-and-bye other subjects claimed her thoughts, and Gladys was forgotten.

If the poor child expected a speedy dismissal she was mistaken, for Leonie was much as usual, and never referred to the intimacy between her companion and Lord Wyndham, and only too thankful was Gladys to let the subject alone. Nevertheless she looked more diligently than ever for some other home, and at length timidly broached the subject.

Mrs. Richardson looked at her in astonishment. "What nonsense," she cried, irritably; "of course you will stay with me until my marriage. I never heard of such thing; how should I get my *trousseau*, I

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wonder, without your nimble fingers and good taste to aid me?"

So Gladys consented.

One evening when she was seated opposite the bride elect, who was employed in looking through and burning sundry love-letters, old bills, etc., she suddenly looked up, saying—

"Did you tell me that Lord Wyndham knew your father in India?"

"No, I never said so." Gladys let a whole bundle of letters slip from her grasp. Ah, that was it—the missing link supplied; she remembered it now distinctly. He was only a lad then, but despite the years that had intervened she could recal the boyish, handsome face, and could almost remember the very tones of his voice.

Gladys was a very bad companion that

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evening, her thoughts ran riot, and she could not fix them on her occupation. Why had he not reminded her of it? Why had he not spoken frankly to her? Did he think she had forgotten, or that she did not care to remember?

And Lionel, too; of course he also had known him in Calcutta. Slowly the mystery unravelled itself.

It was on the eve of Leonie's wedding-day that Gladys at last got speech with the bridegroom elect. They were alone, and Gladys, who had been nervously fidgetting about the room, at length came up to where he stood by the fireplace, and said softly,

"Did you tell Mrs. Richardson that you had known me in India?"

"Yes," laconically.

She drew a long breath. "Do you know

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I never could remember where I had seen you before," she began dreamily, "even now it is all very vague—I must have been quite a little child."

"Yes, an innocent loving child," he says, bending his head, and looking into her calm eyes with insolent scrutiny, "the pet and plaything of all around, and the dearest treasure this world held to your father's heart. It would have killed him to have known all that has passed since!" And with the remembrance of the kindly grey-haired colonel, his voice trembles with emotion, "It seems such a pity."

"Oh, I know," she answers, humbly, covering her face with her hands, "but he would have forgiven me if only I could have gone back to him, for—he loved me so."

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Poor soul, did she recall *one* who had not loved her well enough to pardon ; who was inexorable in his righteous wrath and denunciation of her deceit and hypocrisy?

Perchance, for the brown eyes were dewy and wet with unshed tears, as she once more looked up into the face of her companion, and resumed, brokenly—

“ If he—my husband—”

He shrugs his shoulders scornfully, and turns away.

“ Why do you look like that? It is cruel !” she pants, indignantly. “ Is it then a crime to love ? And am I the first girl who has acted foolishly ? Ah !—” laying her hand beseechingly on his arm—  
“ you don’t know what a temptation it was, nor—how I have regretted it since.”

“ I ought not to preach, God knows,”

he says, ruefully, "but I do know that Lionel Nairn deserved hanging."

A strange look creeps over her face, but before she can say more, Leonie enters the room, resplendent with rubies and diamonds which Claude must admire, and Gladys has no opportunity of renewing the conversation.

On the following day, Leonie Richardson became Lady Wyndham, and sweeter, lovelier bride had never graced the dingy old edifice where the ceremony was performed; yet Gladys had an odd consciousness that she was thinking far more of what was passing in the minds of the spectators than of the solemnity of the service, and the vows she was taking upon her.

That Claude Wyndham loved her, there



was but little doubt, and it remained to be proved whether, amid all her frivolity and selfishness, she had any real affection for him, and whether she would make his home a happy one.

Gladys thought that the fair-haired Leonie had more kindly feeling lying dormant in her nature than the world gave her credit for. Two or three nights before her marriage she had—a most unusual thing with her—gone to Gladys' room, and declared that she was not sleepy, and had a hundred things she wanted to speak of. It was astonishing how much of her fancied invalidism had worn off since she had found something to employ her mind with, and discovered a permanent source of interest and amusement.

Gladys yawned dismally, she was very

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tired, and was just longing to lay her head on the pillow.

“Now don’t look stupid,” said the lady, exactly, and Gladys strove to keep her tired eyelids open while she listened to a rambling dissertation on this, that, and the other, all of which possessed not the slightest particle of interest for Gladys. At length she rose to go—

“And you?”—she said, kindly.

“I shall go at once to Mrs. Bernard’s,” said Gladys. “I think I told you that I am engaged to help the lady, who is very delicate, to bring up the little ones. There is one daughter grown up, I believe, but she belongs to the other family—there are four little mites, the eldest only seven years old.”

Oh, how dreadful!” Leonie shrugged

her shoulders pityingly. "You will have an awful time of it, my dear—children are so *exigeant*."

The girl smiled. No child she had hitherto met with was one half so exacting and querulous as the pretty, peevish widow had been.

"You must come and see me often when we are settled in Lancaster Gate; I shall always be glad to see you," and the impulsive Leonie threw her arms round the astonished girl's neck and kissed her heartily. Gladys fell asleep that night, feeling that by patience and gentleness she had made a friend.


## CHAPTER IV.

"Why should I live! Do I not know  
The life of woman is full of woe!  
With breaking heart and tearful eyes,  
And silent lips, and in the soul  
The secret longings that arise  
Which this world never satisfies!  
Some more, some less, but of the whole  
Not one quite happy, no—not one!"

LONGFELLOW.

Two hours after the wedding guests had departed, Gladys started for her new home, half sighing as she turned her back upon The Cedars.

She rang the bell at No. 17, Beaumont Road, and waited patiently for some moments, but as no one answered her summons and the cabman began to grumble, she rang again. This time the door opened about two inches, and a grimy faced, slovenly girl looked out.



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"Is Mrs. Bernard at home?" asked Gladys, her heart sinking within her.

"Yes, miss, she is," then seeing the luggage, "are you the new maid?"

"No, I am not," answered Gladys, tersely. "Kindly let Mrs. Bernard know that Miss Vaughan has arrived."

The girl stared, but ushered Gladys into an untidy room on the ground floor strewn with toys and children's play-things. In a few moments she reappeared—

"Mrs. Bernard isn't up yet, miss; will you please to wait; Miss Bernard will be down directly."

Gladys waited perhaps ten minutes, when the door again opened, and a pretty child of five or six years old stood in the doorway.

"Come in, dear," said Gladys, reassur-

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ingly; but the child put her fingers in her mouth and did not stir, so Gladys sat still. She was not particularly fond of children, and felt too tired to exert herself on this youngster's behalf.

"Are you *her*?" asked the little one at length, coming up to her, and placing a sticky hand on the neat black dress.

"I say, are you *her*?"

"I don't know, I am sure," responded Gladys merrily. "Who is she? You are rather vague in your enquiries, little lady?"

"Lily, go back to the nursery!" The child obeyed the imperious command, and Gladys rose to greet the smartly dressed young lady who was evidently Miss Bernard.

"I am glad you have come!" she said,


without offering her hand, and speaking in a plaintive tone, "my step-mother is quite ill again to-day, and everything is at sixes and sevens. It is rather too bad to expect *me* to manage the children. Would you like to go to your room?"

Gladys very soon found that she was expected, not only to take part in the training and education of the three little girls, but that the entire responsibility would be thrown on her shoulders, Laura Bernard simply refusing to have anything whatever to do with her little half-sisters, pronouncing them "horrid spoiled brats," although she had a passionate affection for Baby Frank, now some three or four months old, and what portions of her time were not spent in the nursery by the infant's cradle, she wasted in reading

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worthless novels, or in refurbishing her old dresses.

“Heigho!” thought our heroine that first evening in her new home, “Uncle Simon was right when he said that it is terribly hard to earn one’s own living.” But by-and-bye things went on more smoothly. Gladys, who was the essence of neatness and tidiness, quickly reduced the state of chaos to something more nearly approaching order, and although there was very little doubt that the children were inordinately petted and spoiled, Gladys soon found that with a firm hand over them they ceased to rebel. Children know just how far they may go, and exactly how much they may presume, and the little Bernards quickly learned that Gladys would be obeyed.





Mrs. Bernard was an extremely delicate woman, worn out with the care of a young family, and utterly unable to maintain anything like discipline among them, or to cope with their rebellious spirits ; the poor suffering woman clung to Gladys and relied on her, seeming to find a relief in having some one whose advice she could ask and of whose sympathy she was assured.

Laura was, perhaps, the only one in the house who did not cordially like Gladys. It was scarcely a question of jealousy that swayed the girl, for the simple reason that there was no room for it—Gladys was so quiet and unpretending, so ready to aid and assist in anything that lay within her power, that Laura could have no possible cause of offence against her; but the fact

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was very evident that she did not like her, and more than once Gladys was pained and surprised at a repulse from her. Her heart was touched for the friendless, unamiable girl, seemingly unloving and unloveable. And yet, Gladys fancied that beneath the harsh, cold exterior beat warm fierce passions. Listless though she looked, and a prey to *ennui* though she seemed, yawning through the long hours from lassitude and sheer unwillingness to occupy herself, Gladys felt that if a means of rousing and interesting her could be found, Laura Bernard would be quite another creature.

For her step-mother she had evidently no feeling at all, except occasionally one of annoyance when the invalid was worse than usual; she made no secret of cordially

and she looked up at last with a start, for the hall clock was striking eleven.

Eleven ! And Laura not in yet ! She had said she should just take a stroll, for the days were warm and the evenings growing longer, and Gladys had urged her to go, for Laura, as a rule, was disinclined to seek the fresh air, and as Gladys often told her she would be both stronger and happier if she would go out oftener, adding slyly (for she knew the girl's overweening vanity) that hot rooms and the same temperature completely ruined a good complexion.

But Laura had gone out soon after eight and it was now eleven. Pshaw ! She was troubling herself about nothing ! She had probably been so engrossed with her letters that she had not noticed the hall door

close. Laura must have come in long ago. So pondered Gladys, shutting her desk and putting it out of the reach of meddlesome little fingers, before she crept softly upstairs to bed, and then—she paused aghast, for the door of Laura's room was wide open and the bed had been untouched.

Then she had *not* returned. But where could the girl be? The house was shut up for the night; she must sit up for her, that was certain.

Downstairs went Gladys again, feeling no little irritation that she must needs be deprived of a good night's rest.

The clock ticked monotonously in the hall, the half hour after eleven struck, and then twelve. Gladys began to be genuinely alarmed.

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Had anything happened? Had she met with an accident?

At half-past twelve, too exhausted to sit up any longer, she stole quietly upstairs once more, meaning to leave her door open that she might be on the alert at the faintest sound, but as she neared the head of the stairs, to her amazement, she saw that the door of Laura's room, which had been wide open an hour and a half ago, was now firmly shut. But who had closed it?

To the best of her belief not a soul had been stirring in the house save herself since ten o'clock. It was very strange! The handle of the door yielded to her touch, and there, with her face turned to the light, lay Laura Bernard.

"Well I never!" ejaculated Gladys, in sheer surprise.

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The girl moved uneasily in her sleep, and a light broke over her features, a soft, gentle look, which Gladys had never seen there in her waking moments; she stretched out her arms eagerly, half raising herself,

“Jack! Jack!” she cried, and then, seeing that it was Gladys who stood there, a burning blush stained her cheek, and a sullen expression clouded the countenance that for one brief moment, glorified in sleep, had been almost beautiful.

“What do you want?” she demanded peevishly.

No one likes to be roused out of sleep, and Laura Bernard’s dreams had been blissful and joyous.

“Where have you been, and how did you get into the house?” asked Gladys.

“Well, I must say, you are cool,” re-

turned the girl insolently ; “ where I have been and how long I choose to stay, is my own business, I suppose ? ”

“ But—” Gladys was fairly staggered, “ you were not home at eleven o’clock, and I have been sitting up for you ! ”

“ Very kind of you, I am sure,” said the other, grimly. “ That being the case don’t you think that you had better go to bed now, instead of standing there, asking me impertinent questions ? ”

Gladys turned, without another word, and left the room.

She might have been prepared for insolence she told herself, ruefully. One is never thanked for interference, no matter how kindly intentioned, and Laura was the last girl in the world to brook surveillance. Gladys felt vexed that in the impulse of

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the moment, carried away by her amazement, she had questioned her, for if Laura had anything to hide she could scarcely be expected to confide it in answer to her somewhat abrupt queries.

“But how *did* the girl get into the house, and up to her own room without my hearing her?” was the last thought in Gladys’ mind as she fell asleep.



## CHAPTER V.

"Weary, so weary of waiting,  
Waiting for the sympathy sweet,  
For something to love and to love me!"

A WEEK passed away, and things went on much as usual, saving the apparently innocent fact that Laura went out alone every day at half-past four, returning punctually at six, in time for the early tea. It was no business of Gladys' certainly where she went, yet, knowing what she did, she would have given a good deal to be reassured. Mrs. Bernard took no notice of what was undoubtedly an unusual proceeding, never questioning her step-daughter as to these daily rambles, so Gladys felt that she would scarcely be justified in doing so.

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Laura was changed ; she did not sit for hours listless and fretful, but employed herself busily over sundry little elegancies for her toilette, and as the girl had nimble fingers and a taste not altogether to be despised, though inclining perhaps somewhat to smartness and incongruity of colour, she did effect a radical improvement in her personal appearance.

Now it chanced that Gladys had received instructions from Leonie Wyndham to call respecting a certain parcel left by mistake in Prince's Gate, and one bright sunny afternoon she asked and received permission to execute this little commission.

She hovered a moment, uncertain whether to take the straight road or branch across the Park, determining on the latter. The grass was cool and soft beneath her

tread, and she walked slowly onward with the pleasant consciousness of having at least an hour and a half at her own disposal, which only those whose time is the property of others can appreciate.

Not a breath of wind was stirring, and the hum of passers by on the high road grew fainter and fainter as she strolled farther away. The twilight was creeping slowly on, bathing the green turf in a luxurious gloom and shrouding the trees in dim light. There was scarcely a soul in the Park at that hour—once, a man hurried by, scarce giving her a glance, and she fairly started, when, three or four paces from where she stood, she suddenly came upon a couple half hidden by the drooping branches of an old elm. They were far too much engrossed with each other to heed her, and she might

have passed by unwitting that the clue to the mystery that had so perplexed lay close at hand, but something familiar about the form and face which was upturned to her companion, arrested her. And yet—Gladys paused in wonderment—the earnest, wistful gaze, the softened mouth and glowing cheek, were they indeed Laura's, she whom she had mentally stigmatized as homely and unlovely? And the other—the man whom she had called aloud in her dreams, and whom she now was assured she met by stealth—what sort of a man was he to allow a young girl thus to compromise herself? Did he rest quietly in the belief that she had no one who could call him to account, or had his overpowering love and passion for this girl blinded him to all other considerations?

Scarcely ! He was handsome enough if that was all, but in the cold smile and easy *insouciance* that marked the man of the world, Gladys read and recognised at a glance his utter selfishness. It was a rash conclusion to arrive at after so brief a moment's scrutiny. Yet after-events proved that she had not been mistaken.

And now, what is she to do ? Shall she let them know that she is there, or will it be wiser and more politic to steal away undetected, and unobserved ? She flinches from revealing herself, arguing that it can do no possible good, and will only tend to enrage and mortify Laura ; if she had not been sure that it would not move her one hair's breadth from the course she is bent on, she would not have hesitated ; but, with sudden determination, she moves quickly onward,

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only just in time, for they are parting, and she sees him stoop to kiss the willing lips, and hears his languid protestations, and the girl's quick passionate response ; and she hurries away, feeling sick at heart for the desolate woman who has no one to take an interest in her, and who, yearning, pining for love, has given up the rich treasure of her heart's affection to the man who dares not come openly to her parent's house, but persuades her to meet him by stealth among the trees.

When Gladys reached home that evening she found Laura alone in the drawing-room, busily twining a wreath of wild roses round her hat. Mrs. Bernard had retired, and the children were asleep. Gladys threw aside her cloak and took up a book, uncertain whether to speak or keep silence.

Laura went on with her work, unsuspectingly.

"I have been a long way this afternoon and am very tired," commenced Gladys, lamely.

"Indeed!" indifferently.

The tone nettled Gladys.

"I came through the Park," she added, significantly.

Laura looked up quickly.


"Through Hyde Park?"

"Yes; at least, through Kensington Gardens," returned Gladys.

"Oh! many people there, to-day?" asked Laura, calmly.

Evidently the girl had more discretion and *savoir faire* than Gladys had given her credit for.

"Not very many while I was there. *You*



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were too much engrossed to notice, I suppose," slyly.

"I? What do you mean?"

Laura's cheeks flamed scarlet with anger.

"Nothing! Now, don't get angry! I saw you in the Park this afternoon, and thought that perhaps you would prefer to know that I saw you!"

For a moment Laura was undetermined how to reply. Gladys spoke kindly, even coaxingly, and yet—what business had she to watch her, and dog her footsteps? It was not to be tolerated!

"I would be ashamed to be such a sneak," she cried, wrathfully.

Still Gladys kept her temper with a sweetness deserving of a better cause.

"I could not help seeing you," she said,





smiling a little at the girl's evident discomfort. "You were standing under the elm trees,—" pausing aghast, for with flashing eyes, Laura bounded from her seat—

"And you followed me *there!*" she screamed, and then hushed her angry tones, remembering that she was in Gladys' power, should she choose to betray her.

"No," answered Gladys slowly, "I did not follow you there, but—"

A contemptuous smile shot across Laura's dark face, she would not believe a word of what Gladys might say.

"Are you acting wisely, do you think?" asked Gladys kindly. "Is it lady-like or right to meet this man without the knowledge and sanction of your friends?"

"And how do you know that it was not


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by pure accident that we met ? ” returned Laura, shrewdly.

“ I do not *know*,” rejoined Gladys, “ but—well, *you* best know how often you have been there before ! I dare say you think that I have no business to interfere, but, my dear girl, I do it in a kindly spirit and from a wish to serve you ; and, believe me, I would warn you against this man.”

“ I thank you,” scornfully. “ I am so likely to listen to you !—it is so extremely probable that I shall lend an ear to *your* accusations. Come, Miss Vaughan, who knows him the best ? I, who have loved him through six long months, or you, who never saw him before this afternoon ? ”

“ And do you really think that an *honest* man—a man who loved you as pure, good



women *should* be loved—would rest contented with stolen interviews for that space of time. Do you not see that if he meant honourably by you he would have made the acquaintance of your family and asked the sanction of your parents ?”

“ I have none.” The mournful tone struck with a keen ring of pity on Gladys’ ear. “ Who is there to care what becomes of me ?”

“ Your father ! ” suggested Gladys.

The girl covered her face with her hands and rocked herself to and fro. “ *He* cannot help me,” she wailed.

“ Let me be your friend, dear Laura,” said Gladys persuasively. “ I am older than you, and I have known sorrow ; I can at least advise and sympathise with you,” drawing the trembling fingers down from

the wet face, "tell me all about it ! How did you come to know and love him so well ?"

"I met him first at the railway station," confessed Laura. "I dropped my purse, and he picked it up ; and then he spoke to me, and I told him my name, and—oh I can't remember how it all came about—I had no one to love me, and he was always good, always glad to see me. Why do you want to take away the only bit of sunshine and brightness out of my life ?" fiercely ; "I would rather, oh, ten thousand times rather, lie in my coffin than that I should never see him again, that I should never hear the sound of his voice, never feel the touch of his warm fingers, never hear him say how much he loves me." Her voice sank low, and the

last three words were rather softly breathed than spoken.

Was this Laura Bernard—the cold inanimate girl? Gladys looked at the quivering lips and misty eyes, the inexpressibly softened features, listened to the eloquent, pathetic voice, and wondered if she were dreaming.

“My poor child!” was all she could say. Here was a love as vast and entire as her own, as trustful, as all confiding; and must she, too, be disenchanted; must the scales fall from her eyes likewise that she may see the reality in all its hideousness? An unspoken prayer went up from Gladys’ heart as she met the beseeching eyes.

“Is it well, Laura dear, to put your entire trust in any human being?”

“No, I suppose not,” was the wistful

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response, "but I would sooner doubt myself than Jack."

"Who is he? What means of supporting you has he?" asked Gladys, with practical knowledge of the shoals ahead.

"Oh, I don't know I am sure," indifferently. "I have never thought of that."

"Laura, has he spoken of marriage to you? Has he"—noting the red flush of shame on her companion's face, "has he asked you to be his wife?"

"Not in so many words," confusedly. "I do not require such an assurance of his love and fealty!"

"Are you mad?" cried Gladys. "You have known him six months, have condescended to meet him alone and at all hours, have suffered his embraces, and yet are content?"—

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“I *know* he will marry me,” says Laura, doggedly.

Gladys’ eyes filled with tears. “I will tell you what you must do,” she says firmly. “The next time you see him, you must say that you have acted foolishly in having met him clandestinely, and that you are quite determined not to do so again—this will test his love for you, my poor girl! If you are, indeed, as dear to him as you believe, he will never let you go, and your reticence and modesty, although aroused so late, will only increase his admiration and esteem for you. Oh, if girls could be made to understand that men only *love* the woman whom they can also *respect*, and that the evanescent feeling, born of passion and weakness, expires before it be full blown! It is a cruel lesson


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to learn, yet it is one that the hard world teaches to each of us."

"Oh yes; what you say is very true, I know that, and, of course, I should not act in this way for anyone except Jack! He appreciates it, for he knows that it is my love for him that tempts me to set all laws at defiance—he knows," proudly "that I have no will but his!"

"Ah Laura," sighed Gladys, "I wonder how many girls, since the world began, have spoken and thought as you do, and have lived to own themselves mistaken?"

"Yes, but I don't believe there is another man in the world so good and noble as Jack," and the red deepens in her cheek.





“ Put him to the test,” urges Gladys. “ If so be that he loves you, you will not find him wanting, and he will but honour you for your maidenly scruples.”

“ But supposing that—that—” says the poor girl, hiding her face once more.

Gladys bends over her. “ In that case,” she whispers, “ is it not wiser to know the worst at once? If you had a bad wound that required probing, would you hide it from all eyes, and put off the evil day, until it grew so bad that your life itself was endangered ?”

“ But—if he should be angry ?”

“ No man can reasonably be vexed with a girl because she takes care for the greatest jewel in her possession! If he loved you, dear, he would guard it as


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sacredly as you yourself could do; it would be dear to him as a part of himself. If you have to give him up, would it not be much easier to do it now, *yourself*, than to suffer the agony of seeing him weary of you, and growing colder and colder every day?"

"That could never be," says Laura, with quick decision, "he never loved *anyone* so much as he loves me."

"And still he makes no effort to win you for his own, and says no word of marriage!"

"But he will—he will!" cried the poor girl piteously. "Oh Miss Vaughan, if I were to tell him that I could not meet him any more, and he took me at my word, I—I—oh what would become of me?"



“ Better suffer now than afterwards,” says the philosophical Gladys, with a swift looking back, and an inward consciousness that, terrible as the wrench had been between herself and her heart’s love, it was infinitely less agonizing, than it would have been had it come upon her after months of love and tenderness.

“ Go to bed now, Laura,” she says pityingly, “ and think over what I have said to you. When do you expect to see him again ?”

“ To-morrow,” she confesses with drooping head, and brilliant cheeks—

“ Oh, Miss Vaughan, he has been away on the Continent for three weeks, and I missed him so ; is it strange that he should want to see a great deal of me, now that he is back again ? Indeed he is all that is true

and good ; oh if you would but believe in him—”

“ Be brave, dear child. God guard and sustain you ! Remember that the love of a man, unless it be pure and holy, is the greatest evil a woman can know.”

## CHAPTER VI.

“Thus, one more name is added to the list  
Of those who love and are deceived ;  
And one more woman’s life is overcast,  
And one more heart of all its trust bereaved.”

LAURA went out at her appointed time on the following afternoon, and about an hour later, Gladys, from her window, saw her slowly returning, her eyes cast down on the ground, evidently unhappy and dispirited.

“So soon!” said Gladys to herself. “She has spoken to him, and what I so dreaded for her, poor girl, has come to pass.”

But no! Ten minutes afterwards, Laura’s discontented face looked in at the door, and that young lady threw herself impatiently upon a chair, exclaiming—“I

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don't know what can have happened, but Jack was not there to-day."

"Has he ever disappointed you before?" asked Gladys.

"No! he has kept me waiting, often, but he has always come sooner or later; but to-day—" with a suspicion of tears in her dark eyes—"he did not come at all! I suppose something important must have detained him," tapping her foot restlessly on the floor, "but it is not the less provoking. However, there is nothing for it but to wait patiently. Heigho! what an age twenty-four hours will seem."

"You will go again to-morrow?" asked Gladys, in surprise.

"Of course! Why not? Is Jack to be punished for what is no fault of his?" lifting flashing, defiant eyes as she spoke.

"I think I would not go again, dear," suggested Gladys, mildly; "it is a woman's province to be sought."

"Oh bother! If you are going to preach I shan't stay any longer," and she flounced angrily out of the room.


When tea time came, she sent word down that she had a head-ache, and later on, when Gladys, having seen the little ones in bed, went quietly to her door and knocked, a surly voice cried—"Who is there?" And when Gladys said, "It's only I, won't you let me in?" she made reply, "Oh, go away, I am tired, and want to sleep,"—and feeling repulsed, Gladys stole softly away again. She would have consoled and comforted her if she could, but perhaps, after all, solitude was the best panacea for the rebellious, unhappy girl.

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The next day proved stormy, and Laura was obliged to remain at home, and wandered about the house like a disconsolate spirit, doing nothing, and looking the picture of misery.

The following day was Sunday, and when Gladys returned from church in the morning, she found her missing, and with a troubled heart she sat down to carve the joint for the nursery dinner. Afternoon passed away and Laura did not return; evening had closed in, the shutters drawn, and lamps lighted, before Gladys, sitting by Mrs. Bernard's side, heard a latchkey slipped softly into the door, and a quiet footfall along the hall. Gladys laid down her book, thus provoking the fretful query—"Well, Miss Vaughan, what is the matter? Pray don't stop just as you have





reached an interesting part!" And the girl was obliged to resume.

It was past ten o'clock, when, released at length, she ran quickly upstairs. Laura's door was open, but Laura herself was not there; as Gladys passed the nursery a faint sound from within fell upon her ear, and she looked in.

By the crib where lay Baby Frank, with her dark hair resting on the pillow by his curly golden head, and one wee pink palm held fast in her own hot hand, knelt Laura Bernard, in utter abandonment and misery.

One moment Gladys looked on the quiet kneeling figure, and then a fierce sob shook the girl's frame, and she cried aloud—"Oh, my God, how am I to bear it!"

Gladys turned, and with swift footsteps to her own room, feeling that were she

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in Laura's place, she would die sooner than that any eye should witness her agony and humiliation.

Laura took her place at the breakfast table next morning, perhaps a trifle more subdued in her manner, yet with no visible sign of anything having gone wrong with her, and she spoke no word to Gladys of the yesterday's interview.

Two or three days passed by, and as she still maintained an obstinate silence. Gladys resolved to question her.

"Laura, dear," she said, "have you thought well over what we were talking of the other day?"

Laura, who was drawing on her gloves preparatory to going out, looked up quietly—"Respecting Mr. Lennox, Miss Vaughan! Oh yes, I have given the



matter as much consideration as even you could desire."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Well, just at the present moment I intend to go and meet him," she said, defiantly, then, noting the grave look that overshadowed Gladys' face, she added, half penitently, "I am not in a good humour this afternoon, you had better not say anything to me; another time I will listen quietly, I promise—good-bye!" And she was gone before Gladys could reply.

It was hard to believe that this flippant, pert, self-willed girl was the same who had laid her tear-stained face to the innocent one of her baby-brother, and sobbed out her broken heart over his cradle, crying wildly to Heaven for succour. Gladys turned away a little disappointed, and a

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good deal hurt. Ah! if she could have stood beside her half an hour later, seen the anguish on the poor young face, and heard the beseeching cry that rang out from the trembling lips—"Oh Jack, Jack, you did not mean it! tell me that it is not true!"—she might have better understood that until hope was for ever extinguished in her breast, she was dumb regarding her lover's treachery.

And this is how he made reply; he, who held this girl's heart and life and future happiness in his keeping—

"Hush, Laura, and don't be foolish! When a thing has to be done, there is an end of it, and it is of no use rebelling; I shall always love you just as much."

She was woman enough after all to feel the insult—not altogether dead yet to his


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want of respect for her, and his utter and entire selfishness; and for just one moment her idol totters on its pedestal, but alas—she has no one else to feel affection for her, and he has taught her to love him so!

“Do you think I could covet the love that belonged to another?” she asks, scornfully. “Do you really imagine that I could either desire, or stoop so low as to accept what was by right your wife’s?”

And with all a man’s strange contradictory nature, he loved her the better for her pride and scorn for him.

Ah! had Laura Bernard been but true to herself, she might almost have won the love she so madly coveted, but it is not the prize that lies within their reach that men desire, but that which hangs on the top-




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most bough that they press on to, and yearn for.

And this was the sequel to those eagerly demanded and yielded caresses! Love-making under the trees had become a trifle monotonous and wearisome, and he had not striven to hide it from the girl, who loved him far better than his barren, self-loving nature could either comprehend, or place at its right value. And now, on this self-same afternoon, in the self-same place where two or three days ago he had sworn eternal constancy and devotion, he bluntly acknowledges what before he has but vaguely hinted at—namely, his approaching marriage.

But she cannot, will not believe it! Putting away from her with fierce determination the possibility of another being pre-



ferred to herself, the horrible fact that this man, whom she has loved so dearly and truly, can find it in his heart to love her less.

He is provoked at her tears and silent reproaches. I think men are ever most annoyed and vexed at the grief they themselves have aroused, and the most impatient to stem the tears their own harsh words have bidden flow!

“Laura, I can’t talk to you while you cry so,” he says, breaking a small twig from the tree above them, and crushing it between his strong fingers. “You will not understand! Women are so unreasonable; they will not take the trouble to see how a thing really is. I am obliged to marry this girl—it is not a matter of whether I want to do so, or not; it is simply that I

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*must*; the thing is inevitable. I have told you that I don't care for her—what more can you want?"

Ah, what, indeed? Poor child, it is no consolation whatever to hear that Jack Lennox vows he does not love the woman whom nevertheless he intends to honour with his name, and to pass all his after life in company with. But she believes that he tells her so with the idea of comforting her, and she tries to wipe away her tears, seeing how much they vex him. She would have made him an obedient, loving, submissive wife, but men do not care for submission *before* marriage—it is the last thing they either look for or desire, being wholly and solely a concomitant of matrimony; and the sight of Laura's red eyes and piteous attempts to check the falling



shower, have more than a dispiriting—they have an indisputably irritating—effect upon him.

“Now, my dear child, if you will allow me to hear myself speak, I will try to exculpate myself. Of course I am a brute, and a wretch, and everything else, amiable or unamiable, in the female vocabulary, but, this being a particularly civilised and delightfully moral country, a man is not permitted the luxury of more than one wife at a time, so, Laura, just tell me, if you can, what I am to do? Besides, there is one little fact which you appear to have entirely ignored, and that is, that I have never attempted to deceive you, nor led you to suppose for a moment that I was free to marry you.”

The unspoken thought that fills the

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girl's heart, rises to her lips and dies there. "True, it is all true, but I trusted you. I believed your false tongue when you swore you loved me. I did not pause to ask myself—is it well? It would have been better for me if I had." She chokes back the bitter reproach, and raises her eyes to his face, searching it eagerly, anxiously, as if perchance now it is all a dream—an idle tale told in jest, to prove her—but no, a dark frown shadows the face she worships, and a hysterical sob breaks from her again.

"Very well, Laura," he says, shaking off the clinging hand, "if you *will* persist in being so foolish, I must leave you. I *did* think that you would be more sensible, and exert a little self control."

It is no easy thing when love is dead,

and oh ! so difficult, so impossible, where love reigns without a rival, as in poor Laura's loyal heart.

He takes a cigar from his pocket, and lights it deliberately. She watches him, fascinated, entranced, only half conscious, he thinks, with a little compunction, as he stoops to kiss her lips, as he has done scores of times before ; but to his surprise, a look of hatred and repulsion flashes into her face, and she starts back, shuddering as she puts her hands out to ward him off.

" As you will ! " he mutters, carelessly, as he strides away ; and she stands where he has left her, blankly staring into space.


## CHAPTER VII.

“She looks so old,  
And thoughts and fancies, weird and wild,  
Seem of late to have taken hold  
Of her heart, that was once so docile and mild.”  
*LONGFELLOW'S Golden Legend.*

It was many a long week before Gladys learned the story of that afternoon. Going hastily into the drawing-room, she was surprised to find Laura there, and remarked, “I did not know that you had returned, dear; I never heard you come in.”


The girl looked up and laughed, and something in the tone caused Gladys to ask, “Are you not feeling well?”

“Well? oh, perfectly well!” rising and curtseying to the floor, ironically and she refused to speak another word; and finding



her bent on an obstinate silence Gladys left her alone, and a short time afterwards she heard her go upstairs to bed. About ten o'clock she went to rest herself, and paused at Laura's door a moment, but all was still, and she did not like to go in lest she should disturb her. She could not sleep, she was uneasy to the last degree without knowing why, and at last she got up and opened her door cautiously, feeling certain that some one was moving about. And she was not wrong. At the farther end of the corridor stood a tall, white-robed figure. Gladys stood back as with rapid steps it came towards her, and when, after an instant's pause, she looked out again, she caught a glimpse of white drapery at the bottom of the stairs. Quick as thought Gladys threw a wrapper about her and

followed. Who could it be but Laura, and what was she about to do? Was she walking in her sleep? or—a horrible fear contracting her heart. No, she is not asleep! She makes her way cautiously and quickly to the pantry door, turns the handle, and in another instant the flash of a match had all but revealed Gladys' vicinity. Evidently she has not much difficulty in finding what she wants, for after a brief search on an upper shelf she turns out the gas and gropes her way to the staircase, passing so close by Gladys that the girl can hear her quick, panting breath. Up the dim staircase and along the corridor to her own room, and—yes, she has closed the door! Gladys stands outside baffled. She tells herself that she is foolish, that she is alarming herself for nothing, that it



is the most natural thing that Laura should go down to the pantry in search of anything she might require, and yet she cannot rid herself of the sickening dread stealing over her, nor control the impulse that prompts her, nay compels her, spite of all her reasonings, to keep a watch over Laura's movements. Stealthily and noiselessly she tries the handle. Thank God the key is not turned in the lock !

Laura is standing by the fireplace. There is no light in the room, save what filters in through the uncurtained window from the lamp outside ; it flickers uncertainly on the girl's hard, cold features, and plays upon the white fingers that grasp a small blue vial.


Five, ten, twenty, thirty, Gladys counts

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below her breath, and then she pauses, for Laura puts the bottle down, *empty*. A moment she holds the glass up between herself and the light, and then raises it slowly to her lips.

“Laura!”

With a shrill scream the word parts her lips, and Gladys is only just in time to dash the glass from her hand. It lies on the floor smashed into hundreds of atoms, while a dark, thick stream spreads itself over the carpet with a faint, indescribable odour. Another instant and the house is filled with wild, suffocating cries for help. With a low, suppressed howl of baffled rage Laura had flung herself on Gladys with all the strength that madness lends. So fiercely she wrestled that Gladys was spent and bruised, and almost overcome, before at





length the wondering servants came rushing in.

“What is the matter? oh, what is it?”

“I am coming, Mrs. Bernard; don’t be frightened,” cried Gladys; and then, with a pitying look at the girl stretched at her feet, “she will be quiet now, it is over for the present.”

The fit had worn itself out, and Laura lay sullen and motionless.

But when she reached the invalid’s room Gladys burst into a hysterical flood of tears, and wept unrestrainedly.

“Oh, it was so dreadful,” she said, after Mrs. Bernard had listened to the sad tale, “she was so strong and I felt simply powerless.”

“Miss Vaughan, send at once for Dr.

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Rawson. It—it—you don't know! God help me!"

"You need not be frightened now," said Gladys, reassuringly, somewhat startled at the utter misery and despair in the eyes that looked up appealingly into hers, "she will be all right again in a few hours' time."

"Never!" cried the poor woman, stretching out her trembling hands, "the curse has fallen on *her too*. What have I done that I should be afflicted so heavily?"

Gladys gazed blankly at the agitated face. "I do not understand," she whispered.

Her head throbbed so painfully, and her heart beat so thick and fast, she felt she would suffocate.



And then Mrs. Bernard spoke again, tremblingly, slowly, beneath her breath, "What I have so feared, so dreaded, so prayed that a merciful Providence might avert, has come at last; Laura has inherited her father's malady. My—my poor husband is *mad!*"

It would be hard to describe the awful shudder that convulsed her frame as she spoke the dread words, and the poor face turned marble-white with its woe.

"At four different times he has been set at liberty, and he was as sane to all appearance as you or I, but sooner or later it broke out again. Do you wonder that I tremble for his unhappy daughter? Let some one go for Dr. Rawson; he has known and attended her father, and will be better

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able to judge how far she herself is affected."

Deeply moved, Gladys promised to comply with her request.

Dr. Rawson's account was, on the whole, a favourable one. He said that there was no doubt whatever that the seeds of insanity were there, and that at any unforeseen moment they might bear fruit; but the girl had a vigorous constitution, and the very fact of how quickly she had thrown off the effects of this present attack proved that there was but little to fear.

Aside, to Gladys, he said, "Persuade them to send her away, anywhere out of England, where there will be no chance of a recurrence of this painful scene. I mean where she will not be liable to meet with,

or hear news of, this young fellow who has treated her so shamefully.”

For knowing how much importance such a story might assume in the eyes of the medical man, Gladys had frankly entrusted him with the secret of poor Laura’s ill-fated love, and the doctor had rubbed his hands complacently.

“Ah! Alters the whole case. You did quite right to tell me this, my dear young lady. There is a strong disposition to insanity; probably hereditary, and any uneasiness or perturbation of mind must necessarily increase it, still—still there is no reason why, with care and attention, and above all things a complete change of scene with plenty of amusement, she should not wholly recover. Get her away as soon as you can.”

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“What is to be done?” wailed Mrs. Bernard. “Where is the money to come from, and who would take the charge and responsibility of a monomaniac?”

“She is not that,” remonstrated Gladys; “it is only sheer weakness and exhaustion that she is suffering from now, and if, as the doctor seems to think, a complete change of scene and air will strengthen her, I think it ought to be managed somehow. If you can supply us with funds, I will take charge of her myself.”

“You! and who will look after me and the little ones, just when you are becoming such a treasure to me?” sighed the irresolute woman.

Nevertheless, an arrangement was made that Mrs. Bernard and her children should remove to a less expensive house, and

Laura, under Gladys' charge, was to start at once for the Continent.

"Here are £100, Miss Vaughan, and do pray be as careful as you can, won't you? for when it is gone I do not know how I am to spare more," said the invalid.

And Gladys promised that she would not spend a *sous* more than was absolutely necessary.

As for Laura, she showed neither annoyance or pleasure at the prospect. She lay inert and helpless, with her face to the wall, and sometimes the tears would gather and run down her pale cheeks, but she never referred in any manner or way to the terrible events of that never-to-be-forgotten night.


## CHAPTER VIII.

"O, love for a year, a week, a day,  
But alas, for the love that loves alway."

AND now let us turn from the tragic to the domestic comedy.

Leonie Wyndham and her husband have arrived in Prince's Gate, and the little lady, arrayed in a morning wrapper of pale blue cashmere, is busily engaged in pouring out a cup of coffee for her lord and master.

Their married life has been a great success so far; Leonie, thanks to the various amusements provided for her, has almost forgotten to be selfish. It is so simple a thing to be amiable and agreeable when one always has one's own way, and no one contradicts us; so Leonie, full of





bright smiles and coquetries, is still in her husband's eyes the piece of perfection he has always believed her to be. And now she carries his cup herself over to where he sits, and, drawing the hot rolls close to him, she taps his shoulder playfully, saying,

"Claude, put down your letters and talk to me."

He never even glances up.

She lays one white finger on the paper, but he draws it away hurriedly, and she retires with a pout on her pretty face. By-and-bye he looks up, and seeing the expression of injured innocence on his wife's features, pushes his chair away and walks round to her side, imprinting a fond kiss on her fair brow.

"Don't be vexed, Leonie," he says, con-

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tritely, "my letters have accumulated during our absence, and—" he pauses.

"From whom is that one written on foreign paper?" she asks curiously.

"Oh, from a friend abroad," evasively.

"Dear me! how satisfactory!" she returns, with a nearer touch of her real nature than she has ever yet allowed to appear.

He reflects a moment. Shall he tell her or shall he keep his own counsel?

Leonie's small hand travels about among the breakfast cups, and she looks extremely provoking and unrelenting.

It is excessively unpleasant to have a row with your wife, thinks the newly-made husband, and yet women's tongues are apt to wag. No! he rapidly makes up his mind to keep his secret yet a little longer,

so he presses his lips once more to the half-averted cheek and continues his breakfast.

About twelve o'clock on that same day, while Leonie lay at full length on a couch engrossed in an entertaining novel, he came quietly into the room, and strolling over to her, said,

"Darling, I fear you will be disappointed, but I cannot take you to the Albert Hall this afternoon, as I had intended doing."

"Why not?" An ominous flush rises to the fair cheek.

"Because business calls me away from town," he answers shortly.

"What business?" she asks scornfully.

"I cannot tell you now, dear," he rejoins.

"Come, Leonie, you should not feel angry with me," for she has resumed her book

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again. "I am obliged to go, let that suffice; I would not leave you if I could help it, you know that. Now be a good little wife and make up your mind to what is unavoidable."

"Shall you be back to-night?" she looks up to ask coldly.

"Yes, yes, I hope so," vaguely, "but don't sit up for me, Leonie; I may be detained until to morrow. Nay, you are unjust!" as she snatches her hand from his grasp. "I am going on private business of a most important nature, the happiness of more than one is bound up in it," gravely. "Can you not trust me, child?"

She looks calmly into his face with all her rebellious feelings clearly pictured there, and laughs softly beneath her breath—a mocking, taunting laugh. It angers him.

Is this the loving, gentle woman whom he has loved and married? He turns on his heel, and leaves the room, and she hears him run lightly upstairs, whistling as he goes.

Well, she doesn't care, she tells herself. If Claude chooses to be so cruel as to leave her alone on the very first day after their return to England, he can do as he pleases. But somehow her book ceases to interest her, and she throws it aside in disgust.

A few minutes after the ormolu clock on the mantle-shelf has struck the quarter past one o'clock, Claude comes in again with his coat over his arm.

Then he is going already! She is longing to throw herself upon his breast and make all straight between them, but

her perverse nature will not let her, and when he says, lovingly and tenderly,

“Good-bye, my darling wife, I will come back, if possible, this evening,” she steels her heart against him, turning a cold cheek for his caress, never even rising from her seat.

If he is disappointed and aggrieved he does not show it, and in another minute she hears the hall door close, and then her book falls to the ground.

“Claude, Claude, come back!” But he does not hear, and she throws herself again on the couch and bursts into tears.

“Oh dear, oh dear, if he should be killed, or if—if anything dreadful should happen, I should always remember that I would not bid him good-bye.”

Leonie was essentially a woman of im-

pulse, and after she had wept a few tears of contrition and regret, she felt decidedly better, and inclined to think that Claude had been more to blame than herself in the matter, after all, and fell to speculating how she should fill up the time until his return.

“I have a very great mind to go to the Albert Hall by myself, since Claude won't take me,” she says rebelliously. And the notion of doing something she knows full well he would disapprove of, sends the blood to her cheek and the mocking light to her eye.

“Yes, *I will!*” she continues, resolutely, surveying her dainty form in the pier glass at the end of the apartment, “but I won't go quite alone; I think, that would be an unpardonable offence, and I don't want to

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make Claude really angry, only to vex him a little, and teach him not to leave me alone again. I will order the carriage and fetch Gladys Vaughan; she will be delighted to go with me ! ”

So said, so done, and no sooner was lunch ended than Lady Wyndham stepped into her barouche and was driven rapidly in the direction of Notting Hill.

“ Miss Vaughan is not here, my lady,” remonstrated the footman, as Leonie was about to descend.

“ Not here ? not at home, do you mean ? ”

“ No, my lady, the servant says that she left with Mrs. Bernard a few days ago.”

“ Open the door, James, I want to get out ! ”



Leonie descended in a great hurry.

“Do you know where Mrs. Bernard has gone?” she asked of the girl, whose admiring eyes were rivetted on the nodding plumes in her ladyship’s bonnet.

“No, mum ; she never left no address, though I do remember me the children said they was going to the seaside first, and my missis (her as the house belongs to) said they couldn’t afford so big a place as this any longer.”

“Oh, and Miss Vaughan—you are quite sure she went with them?”

“No, mum, leastways she did go away with ’em, but I heard nurse say she was going off to Paris, or some such outlandish part, with the grown up young lady who’s been horful ill.”

“Dear, dear, how very strange,” pon-

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dered Lady Wyndham, reflectively, unwilling to return to the carriage until she had extracted what information she could out of the little maid.

“You are sure she did not leave a note or a message for me—Lady Wyndham—in case I might call?”

“Lawkes no!” returned the girl. “She never hadn’t no one to see her, hadn’t Miss Vaughan, and Mrs. Bernard was that crotchetty and—”

“Never mind, my good girl; I am not interested in Mrs. Bernard, it is Miss Vaughan that I am anxious to hear about.”

“Well, mum, all I know is that Miss Vaughan went with ’em when they left here.”

“Thank you.”

Leonie returned to her carriage baffled and puzzled.

"This is one of the days when everything goes wrong," she said to herself. "Home, John, for I am not going to that Albert Hall by myself," most decidedly.

And her little ladyship was whisked away wondering what on earth had become of Gladys, and why she had not written to acquaint her with her change of address.

"Tiresome child; she knew I was coming home this week," she soliloquised, ever ready to put on other shoulders the blame that might more readily accrue to herself.

When Claude Wyndham reached home, on the evening of the following day, Leonie, weary of being alone and of

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having no one to cater for her amusement, met him with a bright face, from which all traces of discontent and annoyance had vanished, and, like a sensible man, Claude took it as a matter of course that the conjugal sky should be unruffled and clear, and forthwith embraced his bride with lover-like rapture.

When the cloth was removed, crystalised fruits and wine alone remaining on the shining mahogany, and the servants retired to their own quarters, Claude left his seat and drew a chair close to Leonie's side, saying—

“Wife, you blamed me yesterday for leaving you so abruptly, and you insinuated that my plea of ‘business’ was a mere excuse. Now you shall know why I went; read this,” putting into her hand

the self same sheet of thin blue paper that had aroused her feminine curiosity two days before. It was a courteous business letter stating that the writer had been ill for several months, and that on arising from his sick bed he had missed a certain acknowledgment of the sum of one thousand pounds which he had expected to receive, and found, on application to his bankers in London, that the sum had never been drawn but was still in their hands. The note was terse and brief, merely asking for an explanation of the matter, and was signed, "CUTHBERT NAIRN."

"Well," said Leonie, knitting her brows and vainly endeavouring to look as if she understood all about it, "but what has this to do with your hurried journey?"

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“Patience, wife; I must tell you a little before I show you the next letter, so that you may comprehend. You remember that for many years I lived in Calcutta?”

She nodded.


“While there,” he continued, “I made the acquaintance of a young fellow, by name Lionel Nairn—son of the writer of this letter,” tapping the paper he had refolded. “He was a wild, thoughtless lad, with no real harm in him I believe, although from what happened afterwards, I *have* at times thought him the greatest scoundrel possible, but subsequent events have proved me mistaken—he was only weak, not bad. Well, Leonie, to make a very long story short, the passion of Lionel

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Nairn's life was a love of gambling, and, luck being against him, he lost heavily, and lost to *me* a sum I could barely afford to lose then. Mind you, it was not only a debt of honour, but he had won from me previously several hundreds, which I had, of course, promptly paid over, and when I asked for my revenge and he lost this amount at one sitting, I naturally expected to be reimbursed. I did not press for immediate payment, for I judged that he might find it a difficult matter to pay out that sum all at once, but as months went by and he made no mention of the matter, I began to feel sore, and at length asked him, bluntly, for some portion of it. He seemed quite taken by surprise, and stammered out that it was an impossibility at

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present to get together such a sum, and added that if the knowledge of this debt should reach his father's ears it would ruin him. The boy's piteous face and supplicating voice touched me and, badly as I needed the money, I promised to wait, and he assured me, with tears in his eyes, and a tremble in his young voice, that he had vowed never to touch cards again. Some three or four months afterwards, when I was coming over to Europe, I found, to my surprise, that he was on board the 'Seagull' and bound for merrie England in company with myself. Leonie, we had not been a week at sea before he had gambled and lost two hundred pounds which he paid at once, and then I confess I lost my temper and insisted on my own





debt being paid. He urged that I had agreed to wait, and I argued that he had broken his word never to play at cards again, and that luck being against him he always lost and always would lose, and that since he appeared to have money to risk anew I was determined to be paid, or I would disclose the whole affair to his father. I was very angry, but it was not only the loss of the money, which I needed sorely, that made me threaten this, but the horror of seeing the love of gambling so deeply rooted in such a mere boy as he was, and the belief that by appealing to parental authority a check might be put upon him. I was wrong. If I could have foreseen the consequences I would have cut off my right hand sooner than have been

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the means of injuring an innocent person. So then, Leonie, to my great surprise, he told me in strictest confidence, that he was about to be united to a wealthy widow on board. She was a young woman and not unattractive, and as he had certainly paid her marked attention, I took what he said for granted. I laughed a little at the disparity of years between them, for I suppose Mrs. Buckfield must have been at least fifteen years older than Lionel himself; but he was a handsome fellow and if he chose to sell himself for her wealth it was no affair of mine. He told me that the marriage was to take place in two months' time, and that as she had agreed to settle a handsome sum on him there would be no difficulty in

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repaying what he had lost. I promised a discreet silence, and as I overheard the men on board chaff him a good deal about his attentions to 'Money-bags,' I considered the matter settled."

## CHAPTER IX.

"Nothing is steadfast, nothing is true,  
But your love for me and my love for you ;  
My dearest, my dearest heart."

"I DID not see him after we landed in England, for I had business that took me down south, until, much to my surprise, I stumbled on him at Ventnor, where, by-the-bye, I went yesterday. I—"

"To Ventnor, Claude! What could have taken you there? And why did you not tell me where you were going?"

Claude kissed the smooth brow, and drew the fair head on his shoulder, forbearing to reply that she had been so perverse and unapproachable, that he had quitted her side in disgust and vexation at her childishness.


I think Claude was quite a model husband, don't you ?

He evades her question, saying laughingly—

“ I flatter myself I made very good use of my time, seeing that I am already home again, but the fact is I had not much to detain me there.”

She smiles up at him.


“ To continue, Leonie. I was, as I said, at Ventnor, and strolling leisurely homeward one evening, to my infinite surprise, I met Lionel Nairn, and clinging to his arm, and laughing up into his face was one of the loveliest girls it had ever been my lot to encounter. Something in her form and features seemed familiar to me even then, yet at that moment I could not recall what it was. Lionel seemed much embarrassed




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at the rencontre, and I raised my hat and passed on, laughing in my sleeve at the sly young dog, whose eyes were not yet blinded to beauty by glittering gold. Two or three days afterwards I met him again, alone, and he asked me to come that same evening to his hotel, as he wanted to speak with me, and I assented. There was no trace of a woman's presence about the sitting-room into which I was ushered, and I wondered where the charming companion of his rambles had vanished.

“I did not intend to refer to his marriage, but he did so, dashing into the subject with a certain amount of nervousness. Something was wrong regarding settlements and so on, he said, or implied—at any rate, that was the conclusion I drew—and when I laughingly suggested that



could the widow peep behind the scene, she might possibly be a trifle jealous, he replied jauntily that as he intended to be a good husband when the nuptial knot should be tied, he thought it only fair that he should have his fling beforehand. He did not mention in so many words the girl he had with him, and it was scarcely to be wondered at that I should conclude she was some fascinating frail woman with whom he had become entangled. He did not say much about himself either, but he deliberately assured me that his marriage with the wealthy widow was only postponed for a few weeks, and, 'Claude, old fellow,' he said, 'you will just wait quietly until I am my own master; and not vex the Pater with tales of my ill-



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doings ? it would break his heart to know that his son was a gambler !’

“ I grasped his hand heartily, and thinking that he was less likely to indulge his fatal propensity with unpaid debts hanging over his head, than if those same debts were cancelled and blotted out, I said—

“ ‘ All right, Lionel ; I don’t want to get you into trouble, but you must remember that I can’t afford to lose what I have already paid over to you on a similar occasion.’

“ ‘ Oh, I am a fool, Claude,’ he rejoined huskily, ‘ but I think if you knew how utterly wretched I am, you would pity me.’

“ Leonie, I never saw him in life again. He was drowned—how, no one ever knew.





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He went out fishing early in the morning, and he never came back, but the evening tide washed his body on shore.

“A crowd gathered round the hotel where he had been staying, and when I forced my way through to see what was amiss, and if I could be of any assistance, I found his dead body, and the form of a girl lying prostrate upon it. I raised her in my arms, and the moment I looked into her features I recognised the little pet of my early Indian days—the only and dearly loved child of the noblest soldier who ever drew breath, and—Heaven pardon me—I hated Lionel Nairn at that instant. I forgot that he lay at my feet cold and dead, I remembered only with horror and repugnance that it was *he* who had ruined that poor child, and in my soul I cursed him!

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She was very young—a mere girl—and as I gazed at the lovely, expressionless features, with the stamp of purity and innocence even *then*, stamped on her brow, I wondered how he could have found it in him to wreck the peace of mind and blast the future of such a glorious being.

“That girl, Leonie, was Gladys Vaughan! Nay, don’t start, but listen to me patiently. She was his lawful wife! God forgive him for his weakness and the lie he told, when he spoke of his contemplated marriage with Mrs. Buckfield. Did he really think that I was so mean and base that I would have exposed his follies to his father, had I known that the life of an innocent girl was bound up in his? I suppose so, for it pleased him to hold his tongue, and to imply cruel and



dastardly things of the girl he had made his wife.

“ Well, Leonie, I don’t know if it be quite fair to reveal Gladys’ secret, but some time afterwards I met her again, in a new character, and one I thought her a hypocrite for daring to assume; namely, as the betrothed of a man whom you may have heard me speak of—Howard Langridge; and in a fit of virtuous indignation, and perhaps natural annoyance at seeing one of my own sex made a fool of, I told him plainly what she was—or rather, what I thought her to be.

“ The next time I saw her was in your drawing-room, Leonie, and I dare say you remember that I asked you to be a friend to her, for I pitied her sincerely, believing her to be more sinned against than sinning.

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And now, little wife, I must crave your indulgence to go down to Hazelwood tomorrow, and reveal the truth. Heaven grant it may not be too late to bring back happiness to them both."

" 'But—I do not understand?—how have you learned that she was really married? There is no mention of a marriage in this letter?' asked Leonie.

"I forgot to say that when I received that note from Mr. Nairn, I thought it extremely probable that the missing letter he refers to might still be at Ventnor, if, as I expected it would be, it was addressed to me here, and I went down at once to find out for myself. I was not mistaken. Little did Mrs. Simpson imagine what the letter, that had laid so long in the recesses of a big china tea-pot on the

chiffonier in her best parlour, contained. I found the seal unbroken, and the order for a thousand pounds intact.


“ Almost the last act of poor Lionel’s life was to write to his father, confessing his folly and craving pardon, at the same time acknowledging his marriage with Gladys Vaughan, the sweetest, fairest wife that ever man was blest with ; renewing his promises never to yield to temptation again, and declaring that the love of gambling had died within him, and that he had begun a new life. This contrite letter had touched the old man’s heart, and he frankly forgave his son, but ere the ink was dry, on the loving letter he penned in reply, came the horrible news of his boy’s death, and the shock was so great that it almost cost the old man his

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life also. Read what he says to me, dear.”

Leonie’s eyes filled with tears as she read the simple, eloquent words in which the father bewailed his son.

Referring to Gladys, he said, “If she be as sweet a woman as her childhood gave promise of, I cannot wonder that my boy fell in love with her. I shall write to her myself in a few weeks’ time, and if she chooses to come back to Calcutta, my home is hers ; but after having passed so many years in England, she may have found ties there that she will not care to break. All this is an after consideration ; so long as I live, she shall be dear to me for my son’s sake. His last request to me was that I would forgive a broken promise, made long



ago—namely, that he would control his fatal propensity for gambling ; from time to time he assured me that he had no longer the inclination to do so, and as I never saw him with a card in his hand, I did not doubt him, but the passion was too great for him apparently, and he succumbed, and suffered most poignantly, as his last letter reveals. Now as regards that thousand pounds, my son's memory must—”


“Stop, Leonie, you needn't read any more, the rest is purely business. He gives me an order on his bankers, and asks me to acknowledge at once receipt of same, which, of course, he never received. Is it more plain to you now, wife? The poor old man fell ill before

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that letter reached England—paralysis, I believe—hence it was not until a month or two back that the fear of something wrong respecting it occurred to him, and he sent the note that you read a few minutes ago.”

“ I wonder that this second letter should have found you, Claude,” says his wife thoughtfully, “ owing to your change of name, I mean.”

“ It is probably owing to that very fact that I have received it,” he rejoins. “ My old friends in India all know that I am raised to the peerage—it is an easy matter to find Lord Wyndham, where it was a very difficult one to find out the whereabouts of Claude Raynor ! And now my love, while I am down at Hazelwood, will you go and





see Miss Vaughan, and in your own way explain all this terrible misunderstanding ? ”

“ Oh Claude, I would willingly,” hiding her head on her husband’s shoulder, “ but I don’t know where to find her ! ” and forthwith Leonie commences a little confession on her own account; how wilful and naughty she had been, and how at length she had gone to fetch Gladys and found her missing, nor could she find any clue to her whereabouts.

Claude looked grave, quickly brightening as he remarked—

“ Oh well dear, you are certain to have a letter from her soon ; there is little doubt on that score, she is sure to write as soon as she is settled.”

“ We will hope so,” sighed Leonie.  
“ Oh Claude, how she must have suffered,  
poor girl, and she was always so sweet and  
patient.”

“ And what a brute she must have  
thought me,” was Claude’s unspoken  
thought.

## CHAPTER X.


“ Speak to me, speak,  
Be my heart heard,  
Or must it break,  
For one poor word ?  
No vows to bind,  
No pledge I seek,  
Only be kind ;  
Speak to me, speak.”

It was at the close of a glorious June day that Gladys and her companion found themselves in Paris. Laura was tired, and more than half disposed to be cross, but Gladys, who had never been on the Continent before, found so much to interest and amuse her, that she made light of all discomforts, and laughed merrily at Laura's complaints.

“ Just look, Miss Vaughan, I am completely covered with dust,” sighed the girl.

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“ You wo uld have every bit as much if we had travelled over English ground,” returned Gladys. “ You are fatigued, dear, but after a cup of tea you will feel more refreshed, and by to-morrow morning, if you get a good night’s rest, you will be quite another creature. Oh, yes, I know that there are a terrible number of steps to mount before we can reach our room,” in answer to Laura’s peevish declaration that if she must go up and down that wretched staircase before she could go in or out, she would remain in her room altogether—“ but you must remember that money is a consideration just now, and this hotel was recommended as a remarkably cheap one, and of course the higher up we are the less we have to pay. Did you



hear what the servant said just now when she brought the hot water, and finding she was English, you relieved your mind by abusing the room, and the steps we had to ascend before we could reach it—

“ ‘Well if its igh, its *hairy*, Miss!’ so you must comfort yourself with that reflection.”

Laura would not smile. “Not much air in this stuffy little hole,” she said irritably.


“Come dear, you are too tired to see anything in a rosy light to-night. Let me help you to undress, and in the morning you will be yourself again.”

Laura consented. She was worn out, and fell asleep like a tired child, before the cup of tea which Gladys had promised her had arrived.

Certainly there was much to see and to be seen, and for the first fortnight Gladys' time was so fully occupied, that she wrote no other letters save those addressed to Mrs. Bernard; but one afternoon chancing to be rainy, and Laura having provided herself with a novel from Galignani's, Gladys bethought her of Leonie Wyndham, and sat down to write a long account of all their doings.

Two days later, to her great surprise she received a reply. It was indeed something unusual for Leonie to answer anybody's letter by return of post, and Gladys was inclined to think it must have been written before her own arrived.

A look of amusement breaks over her face as she reads, and yet she looks perplexed.



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“ Well,” she says, “ I never knew that Leonie could be mysterious before—what can it all mean ? Is it a new phase of married life—one *I* am not sufficiently acquainted with the state, to have experienced ?” sighing a little sadly.

“ How relieved I was to see your handwriting, and to know where you were, I cannot tell you ;” ran the letter, “ and Claude has already gone—”

“ And why does she not finish the sentence,” says Gladys, half aloud, “ not that I am much interested in knowing where her husband has gone, but to break off in the middle of a sentence in that fashion is, to say the least of it, very tantalising—

“ Dear Gladys, sincerely do I pity you !  
*I know all—*”

“ Underlined too ! This is becoming



more mysterious than ever. What does she know I wonder? Can Lord Wyndham have said anything about my short married life, or—" a vivid red mantles her cheek—" perhaps now that he is married, he does not think it right to have secrets from his wife!" a trifle scornfully. "But I suppose I must not complain, as it does not appear to have altered her feelings towards me. As a rule, I have lost all my friends just as soon as they have discovered my marriage. Some people seem to think you are committing a crime if you *don't* get married, and others behave as if you *had* been guilty of one, if you *do*," turning again to her letter.

"I will write again presently," continued Leonie in her usually rambling style, "but to-day I scarcely know how much



I ought to say, or how much to leave unsaid."

"Ah! and if I expressed an opinion on the subject, it would be that she had not said anything at all intelligible to my dull comprehension. It may be the fault of my limited intellect, but certainly this letter might never have been written, for all the information it conveys. Not a word as to when they came home, or what they are doing—nothing in the world but inuendoes and hints of which I fail to understand a syllable. Oh, Leonie, you are a little goose."

Two or three days later came the solution of the mystery. A short letter from Claude, enclosed in a lengthy one from Howard Langridge himself.

Gladys' face flushed as she read the first

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few lines of Lord Wyndham's note, and hastily turning to the other sheet filled with close writing, she caught her breath with a little gasp.

Laura was lying back lazily on an arm chair, half asleep, if the truth be confessed, and the book she had been reading had fallen at her feet. Gladys gathered up her letters and went off to her own room, where, with locked door, she strove to still the hurried beats of her heart, and read calmly what her own true lover had to say to her. When she lifted her face at length it was white with horror and dismay.

"Can this thing be?" she cried beneath her breath, "or am I dreaming? Is it true that I have been, in the eyes of both these men, a creature so vile, so contemptible? I—I—Oh, what


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have I ever done that I should be so humiliated?"

All the pride and resentment in her nature were stirred to their very depths. What right had they to judge her from their own narrow standard? And the man she loved had dared to look her in the face, believing her to be what she would have blushed to name!

He confesses this, and in the same breath protests his unaltered devotion and craves her forgiveness!

With flashing eyes Gladys regards the poor letter that had cost Howard Langridge so many anxious thoughts and careful manipulation. She cannot or will not see the tenderness breathed forth in every line, ignores the earnest petition for one word of pardon.



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“He must surely know that I could never forgive,” she says feebly.

Ah, Gladys Vaughan, is your love, now that it is put to the test, any truer or deeper than that of the man who, when he found you unworthy, put you out of his heart and life?

“Anything but this I could have overlooked,” she wailed, “but to subject me to such horrible degradation, such humiliation and shame—I—who, God knows, am as innocent as any woman on His beautiful earth—what girl could forgive him who dares to cast a slur on her purity? Not I! I could never, never do it!”

Her answer to Lord Wyndham was very short, but polite, for Gladys was just and calm enough as regarded the man who was not her lover to see that he had done all

in his power to undo the bitter evil he had wrought.

To Howard Langridge she wrote with steady hand and quailing heart—

“I loved you once, too well, to grant what you ask of me. I doubt if any woman living could forgive you! I am sorry your letter ever came to throw a light on, what was to me, a merciful darkness. I can only re-echo your own words, ‘Pray God we may never meet again.’”

That was all. But Howard Langridge knew that all love for him was not dead in the bosom of the woman whom he had loved so madly, and wronged so cruelly. How could he plead again in face of those few cold words? If he saw her, if he were to

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stand face to face with her once more, what could he urge to touch her heart? Would the mere sight of his misery and regret soften her. No! sadly he acknowledged this? He must wait awhile. He had one hope on which to rest and lean. He did not think it possible, that loving him as she confessed she had once done, that she would lightly give her heart to another. But Gladys had not even this crumb of comfort. She had sent him from her with her own hand; it was her will that he should go; he had insulted her, pride whispered, while her heart made reply, "True, true, but he loved me, too, and, oh, how dearly I loved him!"

It was a terrible struggle in the girl's mind, and at length even Laura's obtuse senses discovered that something was

wrong. Gladys drooped and pined daily, but she laughed when Laura asked her if she were ill. No, it was not that, it was nothing physical, it was only that the golden ray of sunshine which might have brightened her life had faded from her path, and that darkest shadows and gloom encircled her on every side, and her broken heart rebelled and sickened within her until she would fain have recalled him if she could, for her love was greater than her pride.

## CHAPTER XI.

"We were not born with true love to trifle,  
Nor born to part because the wind blows cold."

"Only a woman you tell me;  
Only a woman to thee.  
But there's nought that this mere earth containeth,  
Half so dear as that woman to me!"

"CHI SARA SARA!" What is to be, will be,  
and what fate decrees, mortals must bow  
to!

I think that motto might safely be written  
on the fly-leaf of every woman's diary.

Six months have passed away, calmly  
and uneventful enough as regards some of  
our heroes and heroines, while to others it  
has brought great changes, as in the case  
of Ruth Ruddock, or as we should in courtesy  
style her now, Mrs. James Watson,  
from whom Gladys has received a long and



carefully worded letter, containing a detailed account of the marvellous sayings and doings of her month-old baby, who, according to Ruth's belief, was without exception, the most marvellous infant ever born into this world. Gladys promised, much to Ruth's delight, that providing she was back in England at the time the infant was christened, she would stand sponsor.

Gladys laid Ruth's rapturous epistle aside with a sigh—she, who had once been all the world to her little maid, was now counted as something very secondary to husband and baby.

Well, it was only natural of course, yet —“Everybody has someone to love, and to love them,” thought the girl, bitterly, “it is only I who stand alone.”

Even Laura Bernard, whose grief had

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so nearly proved disastrous to herself, was on the high road to consolation.

“Oh, why cannot I forget, too?” said Gladys, wistfully, when, radiant with smiles, Laura burst into her room, and throwing her arms round her neck, sobbed out, incoherently, that “Gustave had asked her to be his wife, and that she was the very happiest girl alive.”

Gladys smiled a little scornfully, although she spoke a few words of congratulation—I think she would have held Laura in higher regard had she been true to the memory of her first love, despite his falsity and desertion. This was, of course, only a foolish fancy, and Laura was undoubtedly a most sensible girl to console herself in such a substantial way, for Gustave Dorrien was richly endowed with this world’s goods,

and yet—"Humph! I suppose I must have a monopoly in the constancy line, as well as a little more than my lawful share of unhappiness and trouble," thought Gladys.

Leonie wrote from time to time, although her letters were rather desultory, owing to the fact that she mixed up her receptions, her husband, and her new dresses and ornaments, in a very bewildering fashion, and Gladys had no slight difficulty in deciphering and making sense out of these productions. Claude was very devoted, wrote her little ladyship; she had just as much money as she knew what to do with, and really, she did not believe that Gladys would think her looking an hour older than on her wedding day, when they had parted.

"How can I expect that she would miss

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or want me among so much splendour and happiness," Gladys would argue humbly. "I am silly to feel disappointed, I might be flattered that she remembers me sufficiently to trouble to write to me at all."

She did not know that she had Claude to thank that she ever had a glimpse of Leonie's handwriting. He never had, and never could forgive himself for the mistake he had made, and its direful consequences ; and with a lingering hope that after all, she would relent and make Howard Langridge a happy man, he would urge his wife from time to time to write to her, and learn how and where she was. I am quite sure that if it had not been for the marital spur, Gladys would have stood a very fair chance of being entirely forgotten ; but the terse, proud note that Claude had lain


away with careful hand, had sent a keener stab to his heart than his pretty, frivolous wife suspected, or if she suspected, would have understood.

And now Laura Bernard, with her companion and *fiancé*, are travelling homewards. The soul of the bride-elect is wholly engrossed with important reflections and discussions concerning her marriage *trousseau*, and she is anxious to reach London, while Gladys, wearied of combined travelling, and sight-seeing, yearns for English faces and English voices once more.

In the Tuilleries gardens the band is playing, and the children are playing on the grass, while their mothers and fathers eat their ices, and jabber incessantly, and the gaily-dressed girls with their attendant

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swains, trail their long dresses over the soft turf. Gladys is alone. Laura has gone to the Louvre with her Gustave, and as the afternoon is mild for the time of year, Gladys has taken a book with her, determining to find a sheltered quiet corner somewhere. But the sad thoughts will come, let her go where she will, and let her strive against them though she may, and with the thought of England comes the memory that there is not one soul there who will be the happier and the better for her home-coming; and she asks herself, despairingly, while the hot tears fill her eyes, if it has been any fault of hers that this thing is so, or if it is not rather Fate that has been very cruel to her in turning away the hearts of those she has loved, and—yes, it is so, she does not care to deny it—




whom she still loves. There is an empty chair next to hers, and she leans her arm upon it, and angrily dashes away the rebellious tears.

A gentleman who is slowly passing by, turns to look curiously at her, and then walks slowly on. Her eyes are blinded, and she sees nothing.

By-and-bye she rises to go. Laura and her *fiancé* have agreed to meet her in the courtyard of the Louvre Hotel, and then they will dine together at a restaurant, and spend the evening at one of the many places of amusement for which Paris is so famous.

She goes unwillingly, knowing that she will be *de trop*, that both the lovers will wish her at Hanover, and yet—Laura is in her



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charge, and by no means as discreet as could be desired, and she must needs perform her duties as chaperone.

She is thinking this, with eyes bent down, and listless gait, as she crosses the turf, and at a little distance from her stands a man, who, with eager, hungry eyes, watches her as she comes nearer and nearer. It is not until within speaking distance, that she looks up, and—recognises him.

Her first impulse is to fly, but her feet seem rooted to the spot. A curious change comes over her face—surprise, fear, delight, possess her soul. And then her hands are caught in his, and he is straining her to him, while he gazes into the sweet, sad face with such unutterable joy and glad



content, as only men who have loved as Howard Langridge did, and have suffered as he has done, could do.

Gladys Vaughan need never sigh again for lack of love to brighten her life; it is here at her feet, if she will but stoop to possess herself of it.

I do not know how long they stood there, with hearts too full for speech, but I do know that when at length they turned to go, life itself had changed for one of them, and that Gladys felt to her heart's core that the sun would shine again for her, and the flowers spring to life and radiance, since the love she yearned for was hers, to do as she willed with.

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“Now, mamma dear, you must really let me have a new hat, too. Positively it will be of no use unless you will; my dress makes this one look uglier and shabbier than ever. I am sure Mr. Langridge must hate the very sight of me in it.”

“Scarcely, with that pretty face underneath it!” returned Mrs. Sourby, who with the trifling exception that she is stouter and redder in the face, is very much the same as when we saw her last. “Well, Charity, my darling, I don’t know how I am to afford it, but we will manage it somehow; you see, your papa is so stingy with his money just now, and it is of no earthly use hinting why I want to make you a little smarter

than the other girls, for he would only laugh at us for our pains, but then—he doesn't know all that *we* do," nodding complacently.

"What did he say, my dear? Just tell me again. Come, don't be shy! He squeezed your hand any way, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did," said Charity, with a coquettish toss of her sandy ringlets. "I met him close against the Hall gates, and he stopped and spoke to me. I hinted that Faith had picked up a beau, and was very likely to be married soon, and he said—" "Indeed! I am sure I am very glad to hear it. The fact is I am so happy myself that I should like everyone else to be so," and then he waited about half a minute, and added, 'I go back to Paris to-night,

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but when I come back, I shall have something to tell you.' ”

“ And did he look at you very lovingly, dear, while he said it ? ”

“ Oh, I can't say, ma ! ”

“ But he squeezed your hand ? ” interrogatively.

“ Yes,” Charity assented.

“ Then my darling, what could he have to say to you, except that he loved you ? You may consider the matter settled. I always thought it would end in this way ! ” complacently. “ Did he call you ‘ Charity ? ’ ”

“ No,” said the girl, “ I suppose he would not like to do that until— ” drooping her head. “ Oh mamma, he was so much nicer to me than he has ever been since that

horrid, forward minx went away," with a gush.

"Ah! he has evidently been most horribly ashamed of himself, and tried his very best to gain our good opinion again. We will forgive him now, Charity, eh?" with a playful finger poised in mid-air.

"I forgave him, long ago," answered the maiden, affectedly, "it was so plainly to be seen that it was not his fault at all, but entirely owing to Gladys' fast and disgusting conduct. I have never seen him carry on with any other girl since, and am quite sure that he never would do so again. But, mamma dear, if I am to have a hat to match my new dress, we must drive into Hazelwood this afternoon, for they are

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such terribly slow coaches there, and he expects to be home by the end of the week."

"So soon ! It is odd that he should have gone away again directly," mused Mrs. Sourby.

"You see," explained Charity, confidentially, "he found that he had left something at home, which he could not do without, and so crossed by the early boat, reached here the same night, and left again next morning."

"Oh !" relievedly. "He told you so, did he ?"

Mrs. Sourby had been disappointed once, and was determined that there should be no hitch this time.

It was high time that her girls were

settled, and Charity, being the flower of the flock, the mother would fain have had her married first.

Now it was perfectly correct that Howard Langridge had said in so many words to Charity exactly what she related to her mother. He came back to Hazelwood to secure what Gladys would not accept him without, namely, his mother's sanction, and endowed with that, and her blessing, he made haste to his lady-love again.

The hat was purchased, and what is more, was paid for; and Charity, the self-same evening that it came home, placed it on her sandy locks, and went downstairs to show it to an admiring trio.

"Well, I must say, dear, it is some

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pleasure to buy things for you, even if one does have to scrape a bit to do it," cried Mrs. Sourby rapturously, gazing at the salmon feather that curled round the brim and fell over her shoulders; "you do show everything off so well—there is so much style about you!"

Charity perked and ogled, standing on tip toe, that she might get a good look at herself in the small mirror on the mantle-shelf.

"Yes, I think it becomes me," she assented, conceitedly.

"I know someone who will think so," returned Mrs. Sourby, while Faith and Hope nudged each other playfully.

"La, mamma," cried Charity, "I bought





it to please myself, I'm sure, and if anyone I like don't fancy—"

But what brilliant and independent sentiment she was about to give birth to was never known, for at that moment Simon Sourby put his head in at the door.—

"My dear, I want you. Why, what tomfoolery is this?" catching sight of his daughter's resplendent decorations.

"Traps to catch unwary birds," said Faith, saucily.

Simon paused a moment, then walked in and closed the door.


"Charity," he said, sternly, "if you have not yet relinquished that most ridiculous idea of yours, and in which I must confess your mother has joined instead

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of checking you, as long ago I told her she ought to do, I beg you will at once do so! I see that I had better make the announcement, that I had intended for my wife's private ear, to you all, only it must not go any further. I have just learned from Mr. Brotherton, Mr. Langridge's lawyer, that—he is about to be married!”

A shrill scream from Charity, elongated faces on the part of Faith and Hope, and a deep ruby on the countenance of their mother, although she tried to speak calmly—

“Yes, I believe that something of that sort *is* in contemplation,” she said, refusing to accept this downfall of her castle. “Our dear Charity—”



“Charity be bothered!” I am afraid the Rev. Simon forgot himself and his profession equally at that trying moment. If so, he must be pardoned, for he was annoyed and irritated beyond endurance. “If you wish to know who the fair lady is to be, I can gratify your curiosity—it is Gladys Vaughan!”

“I don’t believe it!” said Mrs. Sourby. But she did believe it; she knew that it was so.

Charity was about to fall upon the floor in a feigned swoon, as she had done on a previous occasion, but her father caught her, and with a by no means gentle shake, re-seated her.


“Don’t be a simpleton, girl,” he said, angrily, “I am ashamed of you! But it is

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your mother's doing—if she had not been so foolish, all this nonsense would never have happened. Now mind, if I hear one word more of anything of this sort, or if I find either of you girls acting in this unmaidenly way again, which ever of you it is, shall leave home at once, as better women than you have done before. You shall go out as a nursery governess, for you are none of you capable of taking a more exalted situation.”

Mrs. Sourby was stricken dumb. Charity glared at her father, not daring to reply. Faith tossed her head, muttering that she had no need to run after any young man.

Simon looked round at his family—  
“There is one thing more I expect of you,



one and all, and that is to conduct yourselves as rational human beings, should Gladys, as I shrewdly suspect she will do, overlook the past. I am tired to death of this annoyance and folly, and if there is to be any more of it, I will leave Hazelwood, for I am not going to be made a laughing stock to my neighbours because my girls are fools enough to suppose that every man who pays them common civility is in love with them, and wants to marry them."

So saying, Simon Sourby strode out of the room, and closed the door sharply after him.


"So coarse!" murmured his wife.

"So cruel," moaned the afflicted Charity, with her face buried in her pocket-handker-

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chief, and her smart feathers crumpled up against the wall. Alas! they were no longer needed. Charity had finally lost the lover, who, after all, had only existed in her own imagination. Faith and Hope were divided between vexation at the idea of Gladys taking her place as the mistress of the Hall, and delight that Charity, who had been much petted and indulged of late, should be so completely snubbed and defeated.

We will here take leave of this amiable quartette, trusting that the olive branches pertaining to the Sourby family may, as they grow older, learn more of the Faith, Hope, and Charity, that at present exists only in their baptismal cognomens, and have one more peep at our hero and



heroine, before we bid them, too, farewell.

It is evening, and Gladys stands by the open window, looking out into a certain street of a certain square in London. Her lover's arm is round her waist, and his eyes are fondly searching her face—

“And to-morrow will be our wedding day. And all my troubles will melt away, and like the good children in the story-books, we shall live happy ever afterwards?” he says.

She creeps closer yet, and slips her hand into his.

“Yes, dearest. Oh, Howard, I was such a mere child at the time of my first marriage,” she whispers, “that I don't think I ever really loved poor Lionel. It seems dreadful to say so, but the time was so

short, and it has all faded from my memory, and—”

“You will be far happier now,” he answers, tenderly.

“Yes,” she says, “for I have learned many a hard lesson since then, and have paid a heavy penalty for a girlish folly.”

THE END.



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles.

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